

horner + maclellannan
landscape architects



Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas

Report to

The Highland Council
in partnership with
Scottish Natural Heritage

By horner + maclellannan
With Mike Wood, Landscape Architect

1 Dochfour Business Centre
Dochgarroch
Inverness
IV3 8HN

Tel: 01463 861460
Fax: 01463 861 452
Email: inv@hornermaclellannan.co.uk
Website: www.hornermaclellannan.co.uk

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landscape design • masterplanning • environmental assessment

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study was undertaken for consultation alongside the Proposed Highland-wide Local Development Plan. It reviews the existing local landscape designations within The Highland Council area, known as AGLVs, and provides a brief citation for each area which summarises its key landscape and visual characteristics, the special qualities for which it is valued, its key sensitivities to landscape change, and possible measures for its enhancement.

Maps to accompany each citation are provided at 1:200 000 scale.

The study was not intended to constitute a comprehensive review of local landscape designation in The Highland Council area, and its scope was limited by its starting position as defined by the existing AGLVs.

The report of the study is set out in three main sections as follows, with accompanying Appendices:

- Section 2: How to Use this Document
- Section 3: Maps and Citations

1. HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

Structure

Following this introduction, the core content of the report, consisting of the Maps and Citations, is presented as Section 2. The 27 areas covered are shown on the Location Plan (see page 7). The areas are discussed in turn, in each case with the citation text presented in conjunction with the corresponding map.

Appendices provide additional information as follows:

Maps

The maps of each SLA will be presented as Figures based on the Ordnance Survey 1:250000 map (Figures 1-27). To improve legibility, the scale of the Figures will be enlarged to 1:200 000. No revision of the boundaries has been undertaken as part of this study.

Please note that for citation 26: Inninmore Bay and Garbh Shlios, the western boundary at Ardtornish Bay was erroneous and will be amended from the Highland Structure Plan version. This error must have arisen when the original hand-drawn AGLV maps were transferred to digital media. The boundary should not cut across Ardtornish Bay, it should wrap around it following the watershed between Glais Bheinn (479m) and Ardtornish Point. Other SLA boundaries will also be subject to minor alteration to ensure they run contiguously with the NSA boundary, again this was an error.

Unfortunately the mapping is not yet available for inclusion, but will be included prior to consultation. The important point to note is that there has been no revision of boundaries as part of the study and the minor changes proposed are to correct previous errors translating hand drawn maps to digital.

Citations

For each SLA, the citations provide information in four key categories as outlined below.

- *Key landscape and visual characteristics:*
These are aspects or components of landscape character which are judged to be of particular value in the context of the Highland Council area. They have been selected following detailed fieldwork carried out as part of this study, informed by review of the key attributes of Landscape Character Types and Areas as cited in the SNH Landscape Character Assessment series of reports [REFS].
- *Special Qualities and Features*
This section focuses on what makes the area special. In addition to considering the key landscape and visual characteristics, it looks beyond these to identify less tangible and more experiential aspects, which may be a function of personal responses to landscape. Where specific locations and landscape features are considered to contribute strongly to what is special about the area, they may be identified and their importance explained. Such listing should not be interpreted as a comprehensive inventory or gazetteer of notable locations or features in the area.
- *Sensitivities to Change*
These identify the key sensitivities to landscape change for each area. They relate closely to the specific characteristics and qualities which have been judged to be particularly important for the individual area, focussing on those which may be inherently sensitive to change, and how they might be eroded or otherwise adversely

affected by development. Specific types of development pressure which might result in such change are not identified and discussed, nor are generic development control issues, including issues of good siting and design, which may apply across multiple areas, or across the Highland Council area as a whole.

- *Opportunities for Enhancement*

These provide general recommendations for landscape improvement, again focussing on those aspects which most closely influence the special value of the area in question. Specific policies which may facilitate such improvement are not identified. The recommendations are necessarily limited at this scale of study, and explicitly exclude reference to conservation, protection, or management of existing landscape features and attributes.

Additional sections provide the following supplementary information:

- *Location and Extent*

A short statement referring to the location map and boundary, positioning the area under discussion in general terms.

- *Area*

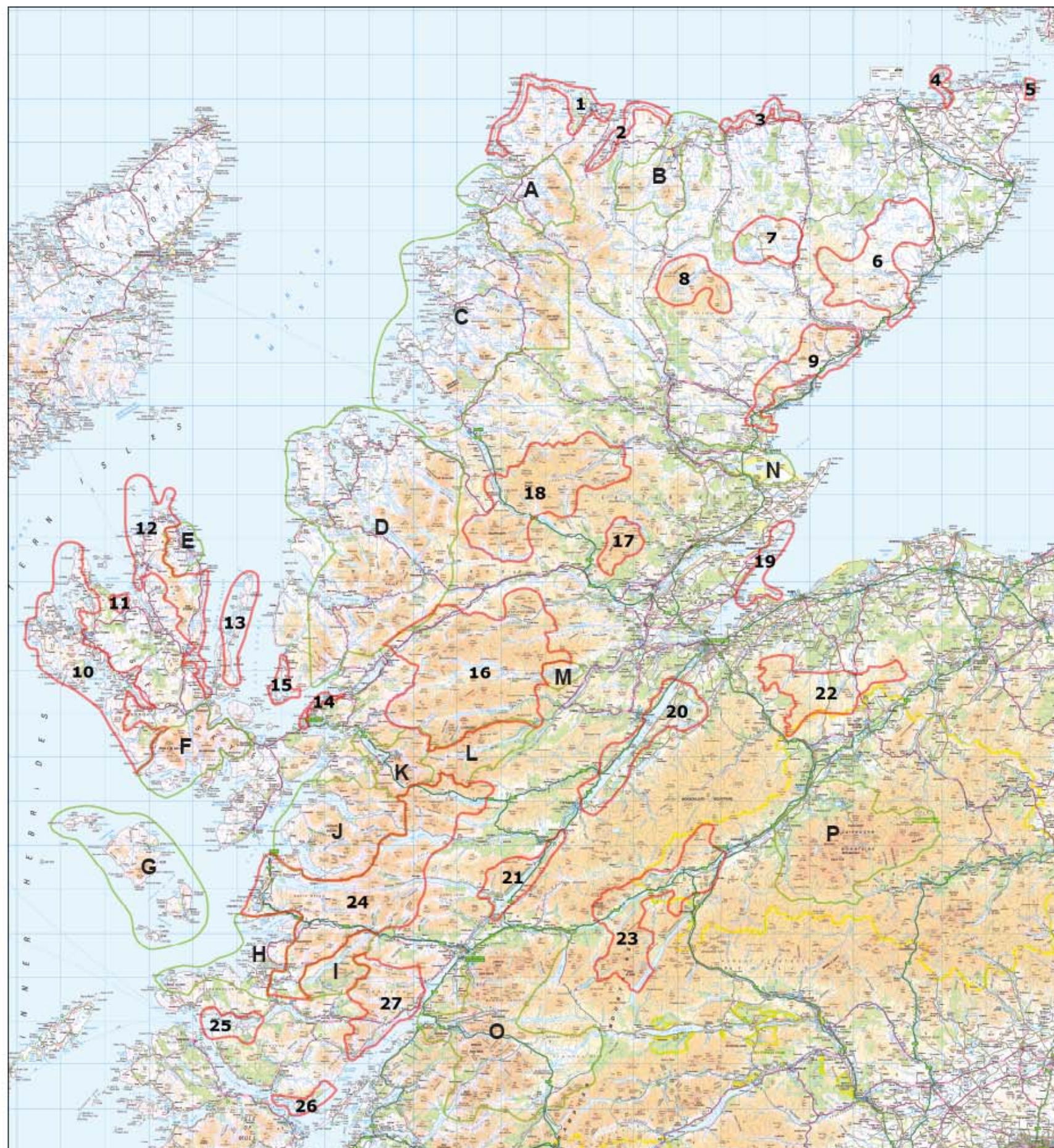
Quantifies the extent of the area in hectares and square kilometres measured in ArcView from 1:250000 OS data.

- *Overview*

A short paragraph containing a succinct and celebratory description of the area, highlighting its most noteworthy and valuable aspects, including landscape qualities or features of which it might embody a particularly fine example.

- *Other designations and interests*

May include specific statutory designations, references to cultural or historic associations, or descriptions of other particular features which have a bearing on key characteristics or special qualities, where these are not identified elsewhere in the citation.



Legend



Special Landscape Area (SLA)

- 1 Oldshoremore, Cape Wrath and Durness
- 2 Eriboll East and Whiten Head
- 3 Farr Bay, Strathly and Portskerra
- 4 Dunnet Head
- 5 Duncansby Head
- 6 Berriedale, Langwell and Knockfin Heights
- 7 Ben Griams and Loch nan Clàr
- 8 Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire
- 9 Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth
- 10 North West Skye
- 11 Greshornish
- 12 Trotternish and Tianavaig
- 13 Raasay and Rona
- 14 Kyle and Plockton
- 15 South West Applecross and the Crowlin Islands
- 16 Strathconon, Monar and Mullardoch
- 17 Ben Wyvis
- 18 Fannichs, Braemore, Freevater and Glen Calvie
- 19 Cromarty Sutors, Rosemarkie and Fort George
- 20 Loch Ness and Duntelchaig
- 21 Loch Lochy and Loch Oich
- 22 Drynachen, Lochindorb and Dava Moors
- 23 Glen Banchoir, Laggan and Ben Alder
- 24 Moidart, Arisaig, West Lochaber and Glen Shiel
- 25 Outer Loch Sunart and Islands
- 26 Inninmore Bay and Garbh Shlios
- 27 Ardgour



National Scenic Area (NSA)

- A North-west Sutherland
- B Kyle of Tongue
- C Assynt - Coigach
- D Wester Ross
- E Trotternish
- F The Cuillin Hills
- G The Small Isles
- H Morar, Moidart and Ardnamurchan
- I Loch Shiel
- J Knoydart
- K Kintail
- L Glen Affric
- M Glen Strathfarrar
- N Dornoch Firth
- O Ben Nevis and Glen Coe
- P The Cairngorm Mountains



0 10km 20km 30km 40km

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Highland SLA

Location Plan

Citation 1. Oldshoremore, Cape Wrath and Durness



Insert map 1

SLA Ref. number/Name	01. Oldshoremore, Cape Wrath and Durness
Location and Extent	REFER TO MAP FIGURE 1. The area extends around the headland of Cape Wrath along the coastline from Oldshoremore in the west to Durness in the north east.
Area	123.41km ² (12341ha).
Overview	This area of remote and varied coastline forms the north-west extremity of the Scottish mainland. The rugged coastline, carved from hard ancient rocks, is interspersed with some fine sandy bays and contrasts with a distinctive green landscape of crofts and pastures on softer limestones around Durness. Perhaps best known for the scenic grandeur of Sandwood Bay, this area also has other high-quality beaches at Oldshoremore and Sangobeg, rugged cliffs around Cape Wrath, dune systems at Faraid Head, and an extensive, sheltered inter-tidal area at the Kyle of Durness. Much of this area is distant from roads and is valued for its sense of remote isolation

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- Extensive, unbroken stretches of remote coastline dominated high cliffs and related landform features including stacks, caves, and ravines.
- Contrasting lower-lying sheltered bays, sandy beaches, dunes, rocky promontories, skerries, and firths.
- Exceptionally diverse geology including important structural features, such as exposed outcroppings of the Moine Thrust, and a large variety of rock types. Resistant rocks are dominated by Torridonian sandstone and Lewisian gneiss form the majority of the coastline, contrasting with the softer Durness limestone which forms a distinctive tract of gentler landscape in the east of the area.
- On the south-west margin the gneissic rocks form a tract of land characterised by rocky knolls and small lochans.
- Extreme difficulty of access to much of the area, with the only vehicular access north of Oldshoremore to Cape Wrath being the long track from the Kyle of Durness Ferry. Inland landscapes are virtually uninhabited, on the coast settlement is limited to clusters of crofting landscapes on the southern and eastern margins.
- Cape Wrath lighthouse is an extreme example of remote habitation accessible by boat and by some 12 miles of single track road across open moor, or by the long walk in from Oldshoremore.
- Flat to gently undulating moorland blanket covers the cliff tops and extends inland providing a simple uniform visual contrast to the cliff face.
- A marked contrast in landform and sense of place is found around the Kyle of Durness where the Cambrian limestone fashions a less rugged landscape, with soft lines of sand along the shore of the estuary with shallow waters and extensive inter-tidal area, and fertile bright-green calcium-rich pasture.
- Distinct limestone/marl lochs with turquoise waters.
- Seaward prospects, with shipping and boat activity, vary along the coast with westward views to the Outer Hebrides and northern views over the rough seas and strong currents of the Pentland Firth

Special Qualities

Remote Coastline

- Extensive uninhabited stretches of coastline accessible only by boat, on foot, or by ferry and track from the Kyle of Durness. The ferry crossing and the restrictions to public access to much of the area during military operations render the experience of this landscape as one dominated by the strong sense of remoteness.
- Superlative remote sandy beaches, dune system at Oldshoremore, accessible only on foot. Kearvaig Bay is very secluded with machair and a small dune system nestled into a break in the cliffs, while the dunes at Balnakeil are extensive, spectacular, active and exhibit a complete range of dune formations
- Distinct limestone/marl lochs, with distinctive turquoise waters, at Croispol, Borralie and Caladail.
- Eilean Hoan and associated islets form a cluster of point features in views from Sangobeg.

Geological and Landscape Diversity

- Steep cliffs formed by hard, ancient Lewisian and Torridonian rocks, for example at Clò Mòr, and eroded moorland plateaux, contrast with the softer limestone scenery around Durness where the shallow kyle penetrates far inland to create a sheltered haven remote from the rough seas of the Pentland Firth.
- Around Durness the Cambrian limestone forms a small-scale but distinctive examples of a *karst* landscape, typified by the renowned Smoo Cave, and including features such as limestone pavements, and sinkholes.

Singular geographic and landscape features

- Cape Wrath marks the extreme north-west corner of mainland Britain and this fact, combined with the absence of habitation and difficulty of access, heightens the experience of being in a highly remote and isolated area where the presence and power of the sea is a dominating force.
- Sandwood Bay is renowned as an outstanding scenic attraction enhanced by its difficulty of access.
- Erosion of the Durness limestone forms distinctive landforms including Smoo Cave.

Sensitivity to change

- Built development which could compromise the sense of wildness along the coast and in the interior.
- Additional metalled roads or access tracks could compromise the experience of remoteness experienced along the coast.
- Additional visual features on moorland slopes or within the setting of beaches and dune systems could compromise the scenic quality.
- Large scale buildings or structures or prominently sited built features could be incongruous in relation to existing small scale features and low lying elements.

Potential for landscape enhancement

- Reinstatement areas of post and wire fencing with drystone walls and repair walls.
- Support regeneration of native woodland and scrub vegetation where this could be expected to grow naturally due to favourable ground conditions and where deer fencing would not be prominent in views.

Other designations/interests

- The site lies within close proximity to the Eriboll East and Whiten Head SLA where views of each can be exchanged from certain locations enhancing each other's setting.
- Sheigra-Oldshoremore SSSI recognises the importance of the three small beaches backed by dune systems and separated by low cnocans.
- The Southern Parphe SSSI includes the dramatic Sandwood Bay, the impounded loch and sea stack, The dynamic dune system is a key feature of this site.
- Both the above sites are included in the Oldshoremore to Sandwood SAC for their coastal habitats.
- The Cape Wrath SSSI, SPA and SAC includes the huge Clò Mòr sea cliffs which provide seabird nest sites on the sandstone ledges.
- The Durness SSSI and SAC has a range of unique habitat features which are dependent on the underlying limestone including grassland, heathland, the marl lochs and the limestone pavement itself. A number of geological features are also designated as well as the unusual sediment transfer system. This involves the movement of sand overland by the wind from the Kyle of Durness, over Faraid head, to the sea on the east via a highly dynamic dune system.
- A Ministry of Defence bombing range is located over Parph Moor and along the coastline between Cape Wrath and the Kyle of Durness creating a further factor deterring access and maintaining wildness. However the associated noise and visual intrusion detract from the wildness of the area.

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in: Stanton, C. 1998. Caithness and Sutherland landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 103.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

Citation 2. Eriboll East and Whiten Head



Insert map 2

SLA Ref. number/Name	02. Eriboll East and Whiten Head
Location and Extent	<p>REFER TO MAP FIGURE 2.</p> <p>Located on the north coast of Sutherland near Durness, this area covers the whole eastern shore of Loch Eriboll, extending from the head of the Loch to Whiten Head and then eastwards along the steep coast of Rubha Thormaid to the bay at Strathan.</p> <p>Inland the area includes sections of the open moorland and occasional crofting landscapes of A' Mhoine.</p>
Area	59km ² (5900ha)
Overview	<p>The area embraces dramatic cliffscapes, sheltered loch and open coastal waters, and exceptional framed views to neighbouring mountains. Ben Hope has a commanding presence and there is the striking outline of Ben Loyal. Loch Eriboll's eastern side has a distinctive and the varied coastline and margins. The contrasts in scenery reveal a very clear relationship with the distinctive underlying geology, which includes an important structural boundary (the Moine Thrust). Inland there are few roads or tracks and crofting areas are rare, giving a predominantly very peaceful character.</p>

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- The distinctive contrasts in scenery reflect an important geological boundary at the edge of the Moine Thrust Belt (which takes its name from the A' Mhoine peninsula). The transition from the older rocks within the thrust belt to younger rocks beyond is echoed by the change in topography. The more rugged landforms and moorland of the Moine rocks on the north coast give way to the more gentle slopes and fields on the shores of the loch.
- Loch Eriboll is a glacial fjord occupying a strong linear north east to south west trending inlet with steep side slopes and deep waters.
- Striking landforms include the impressive headland of Whiten Head, with its twin sea stacks and distinctive quartzite cliffs, and a series of towering sea-cliffs, reaching heights of 257m, which form almost the entire northern coastline of the A' Mhoine peninsula.
- Inland, a high moorland plateau with prominent rugged moorland hills, crags and ridges including Creag na Faolinn at the head of Loch Eriboll, Ben Arnaboll and Ben Heilam near the mouth of the River Hope.
- The shoreline along Loch Eriboll presents an attractive transition in character from low-lying wet heath and tidal flats and sand and shingle bays with rocky outcrops in the south to an increasingly dramatic rising cliffscape in the north.
- The distinctive "T"-shaped peninsula at Ard Neackie and the island of Eilean Choraigh (horse island) form key focal elements within the loch which contrast in scale with their surroundings.
- Dramatic framed views inland along the loch to the southwest towards the mountains, (including Cranstackie, Foinaven, and Arkle), and north to the open Atlantic, come together to give a striking example of a mountain, sea and loch composition.
- The contrast between the sheltered nature of Loch Eriboll and the dramatic and challenging wildness of the mountains, rugged coastline, and the proximity of the open Atlantic further enhance the sense of place.
- Quartzite screes complementing adjoining shingle shorelines and contrasting with the dark heather tones of the hillsides including a striking example on the slopes west of Ben Arnaboll

(Am Breac-Leathad – the speckled slope).

- Isolated farmed areas, including at Eriboll, Hope and East Strathan, form abrupt changes in character from the dominant open moorland to pasture, dwellings, stone walls and tree cover. However these, and other man-made features including the single-track roads with associated signage, walls, fencing, and telegraph poles, have little impact on the perception of an overriding sense of naturalness in this landscape. The impression of this as being an unspoiled landscape is reinforced by its peripheral location and feeling of remoteness.
- Marine aquaculture operations are present in the loch but are of a size which do not detract significantly from the inherent qualities of the landscape and seascape.

Special Qualities

Striking Geological and Landscape Contrasts

- The sharp transition from the rugged cliffs and craggy moorland hills of the A' Moine peninsula to Loch Eriboll's sheltered waters and gentler western and southern shores marks one of Highland's most distinctive geological boundaries.
- The striking light-coloured quartzite cliffs and exposed sea stacks and large sea caves of Whiten Head and the towering cliffs to the east form one of the most memorable coastal landscapes in the North West, juxtaposed with the equally distinctive broad haven formed by the waters of Loch Eriboll.
- North of the mouth of the River Hope, the quartzite geology along the coast results in distinctive landforms (eg many square-cut sea caves) which are rare in a Highland context.

Striking Views

- The loch and its adjoining landforms create a series of framed views, both inland to the dramatic mountains of north Sutherland, and northwards to the open sea, which combine with foregrounds of sheltered waters and rugged shorelines to form impressive visual compositions.

Sparse Settlement and Naturalness

- The sparsely settled nature of the area and absence of road access to much of the peninsula highlights the qualities of remoteness and naturalness where the main focus is directed towards the sights and sounds of the land and sea.
- The size of the sea loch and the absence of a bridge or causeway requires a long diversion of the coast road along the loch-sides through a sheltered and tranquil landscape overlooking boat activity on the often turquoise waters.

- | | |
|--|---|
| Sensitivity to change | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Development could result in a dilution of the stark contrast in landcover at the geological boundary.▪ The addition of further buildings and structures could interrupt views over moorland to the northern cliffs or to the loch shoreline.▪ The addition of further marine structures could introduce visual foci which would compete with Eilean Choraigh or Ardneckie and/or interrupt the linear flow of views along the length of the loch.▪ Additional roads, tracks, buildings or other structures could impinge on the sense of remoteness and wildness or affect the balance of the existing small scale crofting communities.▪ Fencing associated with any areas of natural generation of woodland where these could be conspicuous in views from the road down to the loch and along the length of the loch.▪ Development of further onshore aquaculture infrastructure could impinge particularly if accompanied by materials and debris. |
| Potential for landscape enhancement | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Improve access to the loch shore for pedestrians and provide low key visitor facilities such as interpretation information.▪ Reinstate dilapidated field boundaries.▪ Encourage the regeneration of native woodland where ground conditions are favourable and where any fencing would be inconspicuous in views. |

Other designations/interests

- Close proximity to Oldshoremore/Cape Wrath/Durness SLA giving shared views from certain locations, enhancing the settings of each area.
- The Eriboll SSSI includes part of the Moine Thrust Belt along the eastern shore of Loch Eriboll, reinforcing its importance as a valued landscape. The outcropping limestone along the coast and on the island contribute to the unusual greenness which contrasts with the browns of the opposite (western) shore. The Ard Neackie peninsula is also part of the interest of this site.
- As a deep and extensive anchorage at the northernmost margins of the UK mainland, Loch Eriboll has important links to naval history, particularly in WW2. The loch still sees military exercises from time to time because of this anchorage capacity, its proximity to the Cape Wrath firing range, and its sparse population.
- The Heilam Ferry once carried passengers across Loch Eriboll from Portnancon to Ard Neackie and the ferry house survives (Category B Listed) and is prominently located at the west end of the causeway that links Ard Neackie with the mainland. The associated pier (also Category B Listed) is located to the south.
- Ard Neackie is also home to mid 19th century industry. Two pairs of very well preserved, and very prominent, lime kilns (c.1870) are situated just behind the Heilam Ferry pier (located to ensure the lime could be easily transported by boat from the peninsula). An associated quarry from which the limestone was extracted is located to the rear of the kilns. The complex is Scheduled, and the kilns and pier are also listed (Category B).
- Prehistoric settlement on the gentler slopes overlooking Loch Eriboll are well documented and a number of roundhouses, a broch and a souterrain have been Scheduled in recognition of their exceptional state of preservation.
- Views to mountains in adjacent National Scenic Areas.

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in: Stanton, C. 1998. Caithness and Sutherland landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 103.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

Citation 3. Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra



Insert map 3

SLA Ref. number/Name	03. Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra
Location and Extent	REFER TO MAP FIGURE 3. This area extends along the north coast of Sutherland from Bettyhill in the west to Melvich in the east and includes moorland and crofting areas.
Area	46.75km ² (4675ha).
Overview	This area is characterised by its dramatic, deeply indented coastline of rocky headlands and sheltered bays, backed by a colourful and diverse mosaic of moorland and crofting landscapes. Big skies, combined with the ever-changing effects of the northern coastal light, create the impression of great space and dynamism. Fine weather allows impressive and extensive views, including northwards across the sea to Orkney and along the coast to Cape Wrath and Dunnet Head.

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- Deeply-indented coastline characterised by a repetitive rhythm of alternating rocky headlands and sheltered bays, closely related to the underlying geological structure.¹
- Impressive assemblage of hard/rocky coastal landforms including cliffs, headlands, stacks, arches, caves and ravines.
- Fine sandy beaches in the largest and most sheltered bays form foci which contrast in colour, form and texture with the rocky coastal cliffs.
- Elevated areas on the intervening high ground between the bays close to the sea provide expansive views both parallel to the coast and out to sea, contrasting with a more enclosed, introverted visual character within the major bays. Views south to the inland mountains are also a notable feature of this stretch of coast.
- The large scale, combined with often rapidly changing weather and the distinctive coastal light, create dynamic and dramatic visual effects.
- The immediate coastline is often not visible from the adjacent inland areas due to convex slopes and vertical cliffs and views are consequently focussed on the waters of the Pentland Firth with its strong tides and currents which are clearly visible from many locations.
- Characteristic land cover and settlement patterns of crofting areas form a complex mosaic with moorland areas, occurring predominantly as linear strips or discrete patches, closely associated with physical conditions including soil type and topography. Crofting and farming is largely confined to the slopes around the bays and their subtle patterns contrast with the simple backcloth of hills inland.
- The moorland landscapes, with rolling slopes and hills and a characteristic combination of convex slopes and diverse land cover of grasses, peatland, heather, and rocky outcrops, become noticeably more open and sweeping in character moving eastwards towards Caithness.
- Abandoned and ruined buildings are common, reflecting the harsh, uncompromising nature of the exposed coastal landscape. These form distinctive visual elements, together with the harbours and jetties which occur at regular intervals, and evoke a sense of history and emphasise the past reliance on self-sufficiency in an unforgiving environment.

¹ The broadly east-west line of the coast here cuts sharply across the regional “strike” of the Moinian complex giving a particularly fine example of a “discordant coastline”, where differential erosion of the narrow bands of harder and softer rocks corresponds very closely to the intricate physical features.

- Trees and scrub are rare, mainly restricted to crofts and settlements or in steeper ravines and valleys.

Special Qualities

Dramatically Intricate Coastline and Forceful Sea

- This is a distinctive stretch of rocky coastline which is typically viewed from the cliff tops and enclosed sandy beaches or from the sea by passing vessels. It is deeply eroded by the sea to form a complex assemblage of headlands, cliffs, promontories, stacks, arches, caves and ravines which overlap, layer and intermingle to form a uniquely detailed interface between land and sea.
- This coast can be an awe-inspiring place, particularly in more extreme weather or during heavy oceanic swells. Access to the cliffs and coast line is readily available and allows opportunities to experience the sea's force and scale at close proximity.
- By contrast the sandy bays which alternate with the harsher cliffs and headlands provide a gentle and relaxed experience where the relationship with the sea is of a more intimate nature due to both the low lying location and shelter afforded by flanking cliffs.
- The lighthouse at Strathy is a popular draw to visitors and is approached via the minor road which serves the string of crofts and houses which huddle on the eastern side of the promontory.
- Traditional netting stations now largely abandoned are notable around Strathy Point whilst the sheltered harbour at Portskerra is still well used by local fishermen.

Moorland and Crofting Mosaic

- Rolling landforms trending towards the coast and opening out over bays provide a distinctive range of sequential views and experiences - enclosed or exposed, framed or open, intimate or expansive.
- Rich tapestry of moorland and crofting landscapes with buildings and land cover creating a diverse mix of colour, texture, and form.

Big Skies and Extensive Views

- The sense of place is strongly influenced by the combination of big skies, and the distinctive lighting effects, which create feelings of immense space and dynamism linked to changes of views and moods in direct relationship to weather conditions. Fine weather allows impressive and extensive views to Orkney and along the coast to Cape Wrath and Dunnet Head. The buildings and structures at Dounreay are prominent features in views from Strathy Point. In contrast poor weather restricts views and highlights the bleaker and more isolated aspects of the landscape experience.

Historical Dimension

- The remains of Borge Castle situated on a natural promontory with a defensive bank built across the neck with some ramparts and some masonry from the keep walls still visible, is one of the few surviving medieval (c.16th-17th century) defended promontory forts in this part of the north coast.

Sensitivity to change

- Development on or near the exposed cliff top landscape could interrupt the linear nature and open views or compromise the intricate nature of the coast.
- Development within and around existing settlements (e.g. street lighting, kerbs, signage, pavements) could individually erode their intensely rural character and collectively have a widespread impact on the area.
- Visitor facilities, other than very low-key elements, within sheltered bays could erode the existing tranquillity and sense of remoteness.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tall vertical structures or large-scale buildings could be visible in views along the coast and would be inappropriate in scale in relation to the domestic scale of existing buildings and settlements. ▪ Marine developments could result in the appearance of man-made elements of industrial character being introduced into the existing views from the coastal cliffs to the uninterrupted expanse of sea below.
Potential for landscape enhancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Underground overhead lines where these intrude on views from the road to the coast. ▪ Relocate incongruous structures and tracks (even those outwith the SLA) where these impinge on views along the coast.
Other designations/interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Highland Clearances of the 19th century had a great impact on this area. Many crofters were cleared from infamous Strathnaver including 20 who were sent to Strathy along with 18 others from elsewhere increasing the original crofting population of 4 to 42. The harsh way of life became too much for some and in desperation they set out for a new life overseas leaving the area sparsely populated as it remains today with ruins and abandoned buildings serving as poignant reminders. ▪ Many of the beaches provide good surfing locations where the power of the Atlantic rollers can be experienced. ▪ Important views to mountains within the NSA to the south. ▪ The 30km+ Strathy Coast SSSI falls within this SLA and is designated for a range of features including the notable sandy beaches backed by dune systems and the intervening cliffs and headlands topped by coastal heaths. A smaller section of coast centered on Strathy Point is also designated as SAC for its sea cliff vegetation. ▪ Distinctive ecological conditions associated with areas of sandy soils and extreme climatic conditions allow unusual assemblages of species, which include the rare Scottish Primrose, also readily visible at Strathy Point.
Landscape Character	<p>The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in: Stanton, C. 1998. Caithness and Sutherland landscape character assessment. <u>Scottish Natural Heritage Review</u> No 103.</p> <p><i>All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk</i></p>

Citation 4. Dunnet Head



Insert map 4

SLA Ref. number/Name	04. Dunnet Head
Location and Extent	<p>REFER TO MAP FIGURE 4.</p> <p>This area covers the Dunnet Head peninsula and the adjoining part of Dunnet Bay, including the settlements of Dunnet and West Dunnet.</p>
Area	23.48km ² (2348ha)
Overview	<p>This area includes the most northerly point on mainland Britain. The peninsula is characterised by its prominent headland, striking vertical cliffs and expanse of isolated moorland. Dunnet Head juts out into the Pentland Firth, making the sensation experienced at its northern tip one of being more at sea than on land.</p> <p>To the south settled farmland and a fine sandy beach and dune system provide a contrasting landscape experience. Clear weather allows impressive and extensive views over land and sea to Orkney, Strathy Point, Cape Wrath, Duncansby Head and the distinctive range of hills within the flow country, including the peaks of Morvern, Maiden Pap and Scaraben to the south.</p>

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- A bastion of massive bulk with spectacular seaward views . Views inland to mountain peaks complete an exceptional panorama.
- The landscape comprises a headland which is massive in scale and formed from Old Red Sandstone. In detail, the cliffs form a complex cracked, fissured and eroded profile, with prominent distinctive horizontal strata clearly visible.
- Reaching heights of up to 100m, the cliffs form an abrupt and sharply defined vertical edge to the coastline viewed against the open sea from distance. From the cliff top the exposure can be dramatic and, for some, intimidating.
- Vegetation clings to cliff tops and carpets the ledges, eroding faces and parts of the rocky shoreline. The rich green hues of algae growing on damp areas of the face provide further striated contrast against the red sandstone rock face.
- Sea birds including puffins frequent the cliff ledges and steep coastal grasslands. Together with the pounding spray and constant swell, these birds contribute to a dynamic experience of sounds and movement.
- Sweeping moorland, punctuated by lochans, hilltops and the remains of WWII defensive structures, forms a contrasting open interior to the peninsula, where remote qualities can be experienced within a short distance from the busy and settled areas.
- Views from the elevated peninsula reveal a pattern of pasture and arable fields to the south which mark a distinctive and sharp transition from natural exposed headland to the settled lowlands.

Special Qualities

Panoramic Views from Prominent Headland and Striking Cliffs

- The prominent massive headland forms a striking landmark of massive bulk, at the northernmost point of the British mainland. High numbers of visitors travel along the single-track road to the viewpoint and lighthouse which occupies a commanding position and is itself a prominent feature in views from land and sea.
- The sheer cliffs of distinctive, horizontally layered Old Red Sandstone are enlivened by the changing light and weather conditions, the crashing waves of the Pentland Firth and the presence of many species of nesting sea birds.
- Further landform detail is added by ravines such as Red and Chapel Geos, crags and promontories such as The Neback and Easter Head, and by areas of rocky coast where the cliff has slumped and eroded
- In clear conditions expansive views are obtained, from the cliff tops and from elevated positions, across sea to Orkney, Cape Wrath, Strathy Point, Duncansby Head, and inland to the peaks of Morvern, Maiden Pap and Scaraben. These views, characterised by flat terrain or the low seaward horizon, create strong emotional perceptions of the landscape ranging from lonely and inward looking, to expansive and seemingly infinite, evoking an “edge of world” atmosphere where one feels more part of the seascape than the landscape.

Isolated Moorland and Lochans

- Behind the sea cliffs the headland consist of an outlying area of moorland with scattered lochans, cut off from the landward moors by the farmed and settled coastal strip which extends across the neck of the peninsula.
- Low flat moorland and coastal horizons, emphasised by the elevated headland, create strong emotional perceptions including “edge of world” atmosphere. The moorland seems extensive, even though actually quite small in size, as its edges are typically not seen from its interior, and there are a lack of size indicators.

Contrasting Bay and Cliff Landscapes

- The sweeping curve of fine sandy beach and sheltered agricultural landscape at Dunnet Bay forms a secluded haven in sharp contrast to the elevated and dramatic headland which looms above.

Sensitivity to change

- Development could impinge on either the views towards the headland from east and west or the expansive panorama seen from Dunnet Head itself.
- Development could disrupt the gentle flowing curve and disturb the seclusion offered by Dunnet Bay.
- Large-scale structures on or near to the headland could compromise its perceived scale.

Potential for landscape enhancement

- Reinstate areas of traditional Caithness flagstone ‘fences’.
- Restructure forest areas and encourage native broadleaf species.
- Improve the appearance of the existing visitor facilities including car parking, fencing and interpretation.

Other designations/interests

- Dunnet Head SSSI (and part of the North Caithness Cliffs SPA) fringing the majority of the Dunnet headland and approximately 70% of the length of the SLA, designated for breeding seabirds and cliff vegetation.
- Dunnet Links SSSI designated for its sand dunes and associated coastal geomorphology.
- The cliffs and coastal grassland is valued as an important habitat for sea birds and managed by the RSPB.
- Dunnet Forest was planted as an experiment in silviculture on poor soils in the 1950s but is now managed by the community for recreation and biodiversity.
- Prehistoric settlement and burial remains, including roundhouses and burial cairns (two of which are scheduled) are located around Dunnet Bay, with a well preserved hut circle (roundhouse) surviving within Dunnet Forest.
- The lighthouse which stands on the cliff top of Easter Head was built in 1831 by Robert Stevenson, grandfather of Robert Louis Stevenson.
- Near the lighthouse are minor fortifications built during WWII to protect the naval base at Scapa Flow, including a Chain Home Low radar station and a bunker used by the Royal Observer Corps during the Cold War.
- Burifa Hill on Dunnet Head was the site of the master station and a monitoring station of the northern GEE chain of radio navigation stations during WWII.
- Dunnet Head was also the site of an artillery range during WWII.

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in:

Stanton, C. 1998. Caithness and Sutherland landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 103.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

Citation 5. Duncansby Head



Insert map 5

**SLA Ref.
number/Name****05. Duncansby Head****Location and Extent**

REFER TO MAP FIGURE 5

This area is located at the extreme north east of the British mainland and lies to the east of John o'Groats. It includes both Duncansby Head and the Stacks of Duncansby.

Area8.85km² (885ha)**Overview**

Forming the most north-easterly point on mainland Britain, the headland is notable for its spectacular cliff scenery and its commanding views. The approach to the coastline is across gentle open grassland adding to the visual drama when the cliffs are suddenly encountered and the expansive views of the surrounding sea revealed. A distinctive and diverse sequence of views is available as the paths parallel to the coastline are followed. Huge populations of seabirds use the cliffs as a breeding ground in spring providing a distinctive experience of overwhelming noise and movement.

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- This area of spectacular coastal scenery carved from horizontally bedded Old Red Sandstones with a comprehensive suite of erosional landforms includes cliffs, stacks, geos, arches, caves and wave cut platforms.
- The cliffs are formed of less resistant sandstones than the neighbouring Dunnet Head and are characterised by a lower height (c.60m), and a more abundant vegetation cover on ledges and faces. Views are open and principally seaward with very few glimpses of the shoreline far below. The high cliff landscapes contrast with occasional sand and shingle beaches within sheltered bays.
- In clear conditions, impressive seaward views. Elevated views from the cliff top provide a distinctive sequential visual experience of constantly changing compositions of dramatic landforms and the sea below.
- The cliffs and stacks form ideal nesting habitat for sea birds - in the breeding season the constant noise and movement of these birds form a key feature of the landscape.
- Immediately inland of the Head open grassland and moorland are dominant, wood pole mounted overhead lines are prominent, and crofting settlement increases in density westwards towards John o' Groats.

Special Qualities

Commanding views and ‘End of the Road’ Experience

- The location of the headland at the extreme north-eastern point of the British mainland is a key attribute of the area and is the compelling attraction for the many people who visit.
- The headland is clearly separated from the neighbouring settlement of John O’Groats and the immediate approach to the cliff line is over a simple expanse of open grassland adding to the surprise and drama of the spectacular views when they are ultimately revealed.
- The lighthouse and adjoining car park form a focus for visitors and offer a safe haven from which to venture to appreciate the dynamic forces of the Pentland Firth with its visible powerful currents and turbulent waves which crash onto the shore far below.
- Tidal streams flowing through the Pentland Firth have earned the title ‘Hell’s Mouth’ due to the Atlantic and North Sea ebbing in opposite directions forming a flurry of eddies, races and overfalls including the Duncansby Bore. These are well seen from Duncansby Head.
- In clear conditions, impressive seaward views extend to Dunnet Head and the Orkney Islands while closer inshore, the island of Stroma and the Pentland Skerries form focal features.

Striking and Diverse Coastal Landforms

- The striking arrangement of coastal features and landforms including sheer cliff, rocky arches, jagged stacks, deep ravines, crashing waves and shingle bays concentrated within a relatively small area.
- The coastal edge is a very dynamic environment and in an exposed position such as this the sea cliffs are continually being moulded and transformed by the destructive power of wind and wave. They stand prominent and dark juxtaposed with the simple backdrops of grassland and open sea.
- Dramatic views from the tops of plunging cliffs reveal complex and varied alignments of coastal features. In contrast to these land based views which are dominated by the long, low horizons of the Caithness landscape and the Pentland Firth, views from the sea offer a different perspective of looming vertical rock faces. These can appear as vast, dark walls when in shadow or enlivened by surface detail picked out in sunlight.
- Nesting sea birds, perched precariously on narrow ledges, or swooping close to the cliffs create noise and movement and emphasise the sheer scale and inaccessible nature of the cliff face.

Sensitivity to change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tall structures could diminish the perceived scale of the cliffs when seen from the sea. ▪ Any structures or buildings could impinge on views from the cliff tops. ▪ Change in land use could blur the distinction between the uniform grassland and complex coastline. ▪ Structures or buildings could form dominant elements in the landscape or which would detract from the 'end of the road' experience and perceived remoteness. ▪ Introduction of buildings or structures inland could form new visual foci, drawing attention away from the sea views. ▪ Provide discreet interpretation for visitors.
Potential for landscape enhancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bury existing overhead lines to remove vertical structures and enhance the simple open skyline and impression of remoteness. ▪ Restrict vehicular access to reduce the impact of cars while providing discrete, low-key, footpaths/cycleways from the busy, neighbouring John O'Groats to heighten the sense of remoteness.
Other designations/interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Duncansby Head SSSI designated for breeding seabirds and cliff vegetation. ▪ North Caithness Cliffs SPA designated for breeding seabirds and peregrine. ▪ A temporary fog signal / lighthouse was provided at Duncansby Head during the First World War and replaced thereafter with a permanent one which was gunned by a German bomber during the Second World War. ▪ In 1968 a racon (radar beacon) was installed as this area of coastline is inconspicuous on radar display.
Landscape Character	<p>The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in: Stanton, C. 1998. Caithness and Sutherland landscape character assessment. <u>Scottish Natural Heritage Review</u> No 103.</p> <p><i>All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk</i></p>

Citaton 6. Berriedale, Langwell and Knockfin Heights



Insert Map 6

**SLA Ref.
number/Name****06. Berriedale, Langwell and Knockfin Heights****Location and Extent**

REFER TO MAP FIGURE 6.

This area lies to the north of Helmsdale and extends from Loch More in the north to Badbea in the south and includes the wide expanse of interior peatland known as The Flow Country. It extends westwards to include Knockfin Heights and takes in the peaks of Morven, Maiden Pap and Scaraben as well as part of the coastal shelf and cliffs near Berriedale.

Area363.26km² (36326.44ha).**Overview**

This area includes a large portion of the Flow Country and the complementary, distinctive group of peaks at its southern edge. The area is dominated by the overriding horizontal emphasis to the landscape and the feeling of remoteness and isolation which is experienced directly from within its interior, and indirectly when looking in from the roads and tracks near its boundaries.

The conspicuous and varied arrangement of lone mountain peaks and moorland summits in the southwest of the area forms a distinctive skyline which is visible from many locations. These hills are largely bounded by the valleys of the Berriedale and Langwell rivers and offer a series of fine vantage points from which to enjoy panoramic views over much of the Flow Country and out to the North Sea.

The Berriedale and Langwell valleys are steeply incised in their middle and lower reaches, and as they approach the sea they converge and cleave through the coastal cliffs. These valleys offer welcome shelter and enclosure and a sense of human scale within the wider hinterland. Relatively fertile, wooded and intimate in their lower reaches they provide a contrast with the adjacent expanses of peatland and sea. The woodlands of Langwell and Berriedale together form the largest tract of semi-natural broadleaved woodland in Caithness.

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- A striking combination of mountains rising abruptly from surrounding extensive areas of blanket bog.
- This area includes a large area of flow country completely untouched by forest development and scattered with numerous lochs, lochans and pools. Peatland areas are very difficult to access or cross due to the lack of tracks and roads and because of the drainage conditions. This is a vast open space with a long low horizon.
- Recognising that the inland waterways were a vital method of transport and communication in prehistory monuments are predominantly located along Langwell and Berriedale Waters and their tributaries. The remains represent the full range of major prehistoric features and include chambered cairns, roundhouses, brochs, souterrains, burnt mounds etc; the density of monuments increases as one gets closer to the confluence of the two Waters and their eventual outlet at Berriedale.
- Exposed rock, rocky outcrops and scree, montane vegetation and strong profiles typify the mountains which offer extensive views over the flow country and out to sea.
- Undulating and sloping broad convex hills, plateau, rocky outcrops and crags, dense heather and grassland mosaics characterise the moorland foothills which flank the lone mountains.
- Landform sweeps gently north from impressive elevations across vast open moorland to flat

peatland where a horizontal emphasis prevails.

- Open loch, pools and patches of surface water, networks of watercourses and tussocky wetland grass and heather provide variation and surface detail in the extensive sweeping views.
- Moorland is incised by deeply carved, meandering wooded valleys. Parallel tracks and footpaths, penetrate deep into the interior and afford shelter and protection to the sparse settlements, lodges and bothies and contrast with the vast scale and exposure experienced in the hinterland.
- Sparse settlement, restricted to sheltered valleys or coastal locations leaves the area largely undeveloped and subsequently untouched.

Special Qualities

Distinctive Mountain and Moorland Skyline

- The diverse range of conspicuous mountain characters and profiles, from striking cones to rolling masses, is visible from many locations and these serve as distinctive landmarks. They are typically seen from a distance and it is difficult to perceive their scale or how far away they are.
- Morven forms a prominent conical landmark feature which is visible from both the north coast and the Morayshire coast. It stands in contrast to its long-backed neighbour Scaraben but is echoed on a smaller scale by the rocky profile of the nearby Maiden Pap. The latter is an especially striking landscape feature and backdrop when viewed from the Braemore area.
- Ben Alisky is a remote, isolated peak north of the main range of mountains. Whilst not particularly high (349 metres), it forms a distinctive landmark feature for a wide area of Caithness.
- The distinctive mountain skyline emphasises the very low relief of the surrounding Flow Country landscape.

Exposed Heights, Vast Openness and Intimate Valleys

- The mountain summits offer rare opportunities to view wide ranging panoramas over the flow country, out to sea and as far south as the Cairngorms in clear conditions.
- The vast open sweep of the peatlands with the long, low horizon evokes strong feelings of isolation and remoteness. The mountains on its southern edge and the isolated peak of Ben Alisky are welcome orientation features in a landscape otherwise lacking in landmarks.
- In further contrast to the elevation and exposure of the mountain summits and the wide expanse of the peatland, the deep wooded sections of the Berriedale and Langwell valleys provide intimacy and shelter and are dotted with buildings and other welcoming signs of human habitation.
- Berriedale, at the wooded confluence of Langwell Water and Berriedale Water, is a dispersed settlement with buildings sandwiched between the Berriedale Water and the steep cliffs of the Berriedale Braes, and perched above the steep sea cliffs to the north of the tortuous bends of the A9.
- The concentration of architecturally and historically important buildings in this discrete location range. There is a pair of Telford bridges, the Berriedale post office on west side of the A9. There are mills smithys and row of terrace estate workers houses on the south side of Berriedale Water, with the contrasting redundant salmon bothy, ice house and terraced fisherman cottages on the opposite side of the Water.
- The open terrain of the peatlands area is dominated by big skies with rapidly changing light conditions and weather and it is viewed in a variety of ways. Views from local roads are particularly important along the higher sections of the A9 around Achavanich and Berriedale and from the road into Braemore. Views from the railway which skirts the area's northwestern side, from the valley tracks, from the mountain peaks, or even from aircraft all give different perspectives. Views of the Flow Country from the air in particular give full vantage over the pool systems - landscape features which are relatively inaccessible and not easily appreciated at close proximity or low level.

- Sensitivity to change**
- Development could compromise views of the exposed and striking skyline profile of the lone mountains and peatlands.
 - The introduction of large scale structures could be prominent in views and would affect the perception of the scale of the mountains and the extent of the peatlands.
 - Drainage or other works could affect the hydrology of peatland habitats and associated landcover mosaic. Afforestation could reduce or fragment the large area of open moorland.
 - Intensive grazing could reduce the perceived remoteness and change the pattern of vegetation cover.
 - Large-scale provision for visitors could detract from the sense of remoteness and isolation or would require visually prominent ancillary structures such as new roads/tracks. Introduction of tracks or ATV routes could form visible scars.
 - Visitor interpretation should be low key/discreet.
- Potential for landscape enhancement**
- Increase areas of native broadleaf woodland in straths where appropriate growing conditions exist to reinforce and extend the existing woodlands.
 - Remove remnants of commercial woodland development such as fences and tracks.

Other designations /interests

- This area has qualities of wild land which is recognised in part by the identification of a 'search area for wild land in SNH's Policy Statement on Wildness in Scotland's Countryside.
- The Flow Country was badly damaged between 1979 and 1987 by the planting of non-native coniferous forests and the cutting of thousands of miles of drains. This was encouraged by a system of grants and tax relief for wealthy investors which prioritised timber production over nature conservation and landscape considerations. In 1988 the system was changed to put these other interests on a more equal footing and to encourage more sensitive forest design. However, the effects of the old regime continue in many parts of the Flow Country to this day. Fortunately the Berriedale, Langwell and Knockfin Heights SLA largely escaped such afforestation.
- Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SPA/SAC/RAMSAR – peatland habitats and breeding birds.
- Berriedale and Langwell Waters SAC – Atlantic salmon.
- East Caithness Cliffs SAC and SPA – cliff vegetation and breeding seabirds & peregrine.
- Langwell Lodge is designated under the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes and lies within the sheltered Berriedale Braes making a major contribution to the surrounding scenery.
- Badbea village, on the coast southwest of Berriedale, marks a poignant point in Scottish history as one of the desolate and harsh locations to which crofters were evicted during the infamous Clearances throughout this area.
- The ruins of the 15th-century Berriedale Castle and nearby twin navigation towers dubbed the Duke's Candlesticks, form distinctive man-made features within a largely natural and featureless landscape.
- Former fishermen's cottages line the shore while the parish church and manse of Berriedale date from 1826 when they were built to a standard Parliamentary design by Thomas Telford (1757 - 1834).

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in:

Stanton, C. 1998. Caithness and Sutherland landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 103.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

Citation 7. Ben Griams and Loch nan Clàr



Insert Map 7

**SLA Ref.
number/Name****07. Ben Griams and Loch nan Clàr****Location and Extent**

REFER TO MAP FIGURE 7

This area of remote hills and large hill lochs lies just west of the Kinbrace-Forsinard section of the A897 in east Sutherland. It extends from Loch Rimsdale in the west to Loch an Ruathair in the east. It's northern boundary takes in Loch Druim a' Chliabhain while the southern boundary includes Loch Badanloch. just south of Forsinard Station in the north east to Achentoul in the south east, including Loch an Ruathair, and stretching westwards to take in the lochs and lochans to the north and west of Ben Giam Mor.

Area134.16km² (13416.16ha).**Overview**

This area is focused around a trio of prominent, isolated hills (Ben Giam Mor, Ben Giam Beg and Meall a' Bhùirich), which rise abruptly out of the surrounding sweeping moorland and the series of large nearby hill lochs which are integral to their setting. The lochs include the extensive body of water which feeds the River Helmsdale and carries three names on account of its intricate shape - Loch Rimsdale, Loch Nan Clar and Loch Badanloch. They also include several which feed into the River Halladale, the largest of which are Loch Druim a' Chliabhain and Loch an Ruathair.

It has a strong sense of remoteness and space because although traversed or bounded by two single-track public roads, these roads see little traffic, and the area lies deep inland and is almost completely uninhabited,.

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- A conspicuous cluster of peaks within a wider lower lying landscape of lochs, watercourses and sweeping moorland.
- Montane grassland scattered with rocky outcrops, broken by areas of scree and incised with watercourses cutting into the mountainside.
- Vast extents of open moorland with a unifying mosaic of rough grassland and heathers form a simple composition which changes with the seasons and light conditions, with strong reds of deer grass prevailing in autumn.
- Regrettably coniferous plantations appear as stark, angular, dark blocks which contrast with the muted colours, textures and sinuous patterns of the moorland vegetation.
- The blanket of sweeping, isolated moorland is punctuated by large hill lochs and pierced by distinctive peaks which offer a range of environments for different activities in a remote setting.
- Flat boggy ground is criss-crossed by a series of larger burns and tributaries providing connections between the lochs and lochans and presenting barriers to access.
- Pockets of sheep grazings, stone walls, post and wire fencing and telegraph poles mark the transition from isolated mountain and moorland to the road and rail corridor which defines the eastern boundary.
- The B871 is a prominent man-made linear feature which traverses and provides limited access to what is otherwise a remote and inaccessible area.

- Lightly peppered across the landscape are the remains of prehistoric settlement, cleared later medieval townships and shielings. Frequent archaeological features such as cairns and hut circles are commonly found within the shelter of landform, in proximity to open water, and atop Ben Giam Mor.
- Views are expansive but the interior hills form visual foci.
- The isolated nature of this mountain, moorland and loch landscape means that it is little disturbed and retains a sense of wildness which increases with distance from the A897.
- Access throughout the area is predominantly limited to walkers, stalkers and fisherman who enjoy an experience of isolation and solitude.

Special Qualities

Accessible Solitude

- A conspicuous cluster of peaks fashioned from Old Red Sandstone, Ben Griam Mor (*big dark hill*) and Ben Griam Beg (*small dark hill*) along with the less prominent Meall a' Bhùirich (*roaring hill*) lie within a wider lower lying landscape of lochs, watercourses and sweeping moorland.
- Several lochs including the Loch nan Clàr/ Badanloch/ Rimsdale system punctuate the open moorland marking distinctive moorland basins and providing horizontal reference which highlights the surrounding slopes. In still conditions, these have reflective water surfaces which contrast with the rich matt qualities of the moor.
- The little-used single-track road through wild mountain and moorland with open and extensive views provides an experience of solitude for the road traveller.
- Well maintained stalking and access tracks provide access into parts of the interior of this remote landscape.
- Fishing on the remote hill lochs here provides a supreme experience of isolation and peacefulness.

Flow Country Views

- The isolated and well-defined summits offer a rare appreciation of the vast extent of the Caithness and Sutherland peatlands which is punctuated by distant lone summits including Ben Alisky, Morven and the Maiden Pap.
- The A897, near the north east corner of this SLA, is one of few locations in Caithness and Sutherland to offer views over a Flow Country pool system from a public road.

Sensitivity to change

- Any form of development could impinge on views of the exposed and striking nature of mountain ridges and peaks or compromise their perceived scale.
- Development could introduce point or vertical features which would punctuate or disrupt the sweeping views over the moorland and lochs.
- Dramatic change in land use could destroy the perceived wildness.
- Any works which could alter the existing drainage system.
- All - terrain vehicle tracking could scar the open moorland.
- Visitor interpretation at key locations alongside the A897 should be low key and discreetly located.

Potential for landscape enhancement

- Restructure forestry plantations and restock to include native broadleaf species or remove altogether, including associated tracks and fences.

Other designations/interests

- This area has qualities of wild land which are recognised in part by the proximity of two 'search areas for wild land' identified in the SNH Policy Statement on Wildness in Scotland's Countryside.
- Ben Griam Beg is crowned by the highest known hillfort in Scotland with a distinctive associated network of ruined walls being the remains of an external settlement.
- The site comprises areas of SSSI due to the internationally important range of montane and blanket bogland habitats. The Ben Griams SSSI is notified for the unusual combination of montane habitats which occurs on the summits of both hills in close proximity to the blanket of peatland which clothes the surrounding land and the transition between the two which is well demonstrated here. This site and the nearby Badanloch Bogs SSSI are also within the Peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland SAC and SPA.
- One of the many ruins within this area includes the Greamarchy township which experienced the infamous Clearances.
- Garvault Hotel is the most remote hotel in Scotland.
- Loch nan Clàr was damned in the early 1900s (first of its kind in Scotland) in order to maintain the water level in the River Helmsdale.

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in:

Stanton, C. 1998. Caithness and Sutherland landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 103.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

Citation 8. Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire



Insert Map 8

SLA Ref. number/Name	08. Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire
Location and Extent	REFER TO MAP FIGURE 8 Centred on Loch Choire, to the southeast of Altnaharra in Sutherland, the area includes Ben Klibreck and part of the neighbouring massif of Ben Armine.
Area	138.15km ² (13815.54ha)
Overview	One of several prominent lone mountains and mountain groups which rise dramatically from a sea of surrounding moorland in central Sutherland, Ben Klibreck is notable for its distinctive western profile. It rises like a great wave above Strath Vagastie and Loch Naver and is the dominant landscape feature in this part of Sutherland. It is separated from the neighbouring Ben Armine Forest by a lonely and secluded glen occupied by Loch Choire and Loch a' Bhealaich. The slopes rising from the southern shores of these lochs have fine remnants of native broad-leaved woodland.

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- A very large-scale landscape in which a prominent, high isolated mountain ridge rises conspicuously from the surrounding moorland with its very distinctive profile particularly in views from the south. The contrasting lower, neighbouring massif is characterised by more subdued landforms, with its steeper aspects not visible from the A836 road. Exceptional panoramic views are available from high ridges and summits in clear conditions.
- Notably secluded and remote lochs occupy the trough between the two main massifs.
- Diverse upland habitats characterised by mosaics of heathland and grassland, with frequent rocky outcrops, screes and crags. Fragments of broadleaf woodland on the lower ground including important remnant broad-leaved native woodland.
- Pockets of gently sloping improved pastoral land fringe the shores of the two main lochs scattered with mature trees and stone sheepfolds. Occasional coniferous plantations appear particularly incongruous, contrasting in shape, colour and texture. This incongruity is particularly prominent when viewing from the isolated hill tops and distracts from the open panoramas seen from these areas.
- Strong sense of wildness and remoteness created by the isolated mountains and their enclosure of the central valley between them, the open moorland, and extremely sparse settlement.

Special Qualities

Distinctive Mountains

- The prominent mountain ridge of Ben Klibreck is a popular, fairly easy climb from Altnaharra but the absence of formal tracks means the area retains a strong sense of wildness. A long crescent-shaped ridge forms the spine of Ben Klibreck with its steep western slopes descending to Strath Vagastie and Loch Naver. A conspicuous break of slope above the crags of A 'Chioch, topped by the summit cone of Meall nan Con, forms the distinctive stepped profile seen in views from the south. Contrasting eastern slopes forming large grassy corries which sweep more gently down to the shores of Loch Choire and Loch a' Bhealaich, dissected by parallel watercourses.
- The Ben Armine massif is less dramatic than Ben Klibreck but the steep bounding slopes on its eastern and northern sides provide a contrast with the relatively flat Flow Country beyond. This juxtaposition and vantage point is given added significance by the fact that Ben Armine is one of the most remote hill summits in Scotland.

Secluded Valley with Network of Tracks

- Notably secluded valley with remote lochs and estate lodge, enhanced by important native woodland remnants. Through-routes for non-vehicular traffic from Crask to Forsinard and numerous tracks south of the Loch.

Extensive Views from Peaks and Summits

- Exceptional panoramic views from high ridges and summits in clear conditions, extending to the northern coastline and beyond, taking in neighbouring peaks including Ben Hope and Ben Loyal and vast areas of surrounding moorland.

The Historical Dimension

- The isolated remains of a cleared township and a number of shielings are located on the southern shore of Loch Choire. The flatter area to the east of Ben Klibreck represents the southern extent of an extensive prehistoric settlement that is predominantly south of Loch Naver. Accordingly, a number of roundhouses, a burnt mound and a field system are recorded, although the main area of settlement lies outwith the boundary to the north.

Sensitivity to change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development could interrupt the relationship between the open foreground setting and the drama of the isolated mountains. ▪ Development could impinge on the secluded character of the central valley. ▪ Significant changes to landuse could dilute the sense of wildness.
Potential for landscape enhancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reinforce, link and extend areas of scattered native woodland, particularly in relation to the loch side and along associated watercourses and glens where it is possible to do so without associated fencing being prominent.
Other designations/interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Ben Klibreck SSSI includes windswept montane grasslands and heaths, the spectacular birch woodlands on the southern shores and crags above Loch Choire, the pristine waters of Loch Choire and the surrounding blanketbog. Also included in this SLA is part of the extensive Skinsdale Peatlands SSSI which is part of the Peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland SAC and SPA. ▪ Scheduled Monument located on the E flank of Meall nan Con, the highest summit of the Ben Kilbreck Ridge. It is a campsite and survey station constructed by soldiers of the Ordnance Survey in the early 19th century whilst conducting the first triangulation of Scotland. There are several standing remains including the original survey cairn, several shelters and foundations, two triangulation pillars, a stone building, and tent platforms. ▪ The wild qualities are recognised in part by the identification of a 'search area for wild land' in the SNH Policy Statement on Wildness in Scotland's Countryside. ▪ Ben Klibreck is the second most northerly Munro (after Ben Hope). ▪ The area formed part of one of the first sheep farms on the Sutherland Estate following the infamous Clearances. It is now marked by numerous ruined sheepfolds. ▪ A memorial to crashed airmen can be found at the end of Meall Ailein (the eastern end of the main Ben Klibreck summit ridge).
Landscape Character	<p>The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in:</p> <p>Stanton, C. 1998. Caithness and Sutherland landscape character assessment. <u>Scottish Natural Heritage Review</u> No 103.</p> <p><i>All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk</i></p>

Citation 9. Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth



Insert Map 9

SLA Ref. number/Name	09. Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth
Location and Extent	<p>REFER TO MAP FIGURE 9</p> <p>Lying along the east coast of Sutherland, this area stretches from just south of Strath Ullie in the north to Loch Fleet in the south, including areas of coastal shelf and moorland.</p>
Area	210.41km ² (21041.71ha)
Overview	This is a diverse area of rolling moorland plateau, punctuated by a series of diverse southeast trending glens, straths and lochs. It is fringed to the east by a narrow strip of farmed coastal shelf set between moorland and the shoreline, and tidal basin of Loch Fleet.

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- A relatively uniform, rolling plateau of broad, interwoven rounded hills, comprising an open mosaic of heather and grass moorland. As this composition is fairly simple, and extends throughout the area, there is a strong consistency of character.
- The hill area is breached by three main valleys. The straths and glens have differing local character derived from the varying combination of native woodland, forest plantation, moorland and water bodies. They provide sheltered access routes through the hills and provide physical and visual connections to the coastal shelf and North Sea.
- To the east lies a narrow but relatively fertile coastal shelf, set between the moorland edge and rocky foreshore, which contains the main road and rail routes in this area, and small farms and settlements at fairly regular intervals. Bold field patterns of pastureland and grazing defined by windswept trees and stone walls offer a stark contrast to the moorland.
- The linear coastal shelf, bounded on the northeastern side by the rising moorland edge, provides expansive views both along the coastal edge and outwards across open sea. Interior views are limited by the convex slopes and hill landform.
- Loch Fleet, the most northerly inlet on the east coast and defined by its distinctive opposing spits of land, comprises a sheltered, enclosed tidal basin fringed with shingle shores and pine woods. At low tide, its exposed mudflats create a distinctive scene which is animated by large flocks of wading birds.
- Views are obtained from some areas of wind turbines and overhead electricity lines.
- Skelbo Castle is a dominant feature on the south-side of Loch Fleet, sitting atop a hill commanding excellent views of the loch.

Special Qualities

Cultural heritage

- The Mound is a very prominent and clearly man-made causeway. Engineered by T Telford in 1814-16 it spans the mouth of Loch Fleet with a bridge at its northern end.
- The hills that separate Loch Brora from Glen Loth have a light scattering of mainly later medieval settlement and shielings. Apart from on the most inaccessible hills, head dykes and enclosures can be traced through the landscape with the occasional remains of a settlement located along a river valley in between.
- Glen Loth is rich in past settlement remains. Well preserved prehistoric remains proliferate from the flat coastal areas. Heading north as the steepness of the glen sides soften the density of prehistoric settlement and later medieval township remains increases. Interspersed within the townships prehistoric settlement remains, souterrains and standing stones still survive.
- The hills to the east of Glen Loth are crossed by numerous head dykes and boundary dykes.
- In Glen Loth a pair of prominent standing stones are located on a small hillock to the North of Carradh nan Clach, with the remains of a substantial broch located just to the south.
- Substantial remains of later medieval township remains, centred around Loth Burn in the lower slopes of Beinn Mhealaich, are still very visible and easily identifiable within the landscape.
- Centred around the banks of Loch Brora, monuments include well defined burial cairns, roundhouses and associated field systems, brochs and homesteads. Many of these early sites have been incorporated within the field systems and head dykes of extensive later medieval townships which themselves survive along the Loch.
- Prehistoric settlement and burial cairns are located on the eastern slopes of Cnoc Odhar overlooking Loch Fleet and on the south-facing slopes of Creag an Amalaidh. On the north-side of Loch Fleet on the flat improved plains in between The Mound and Kirkton another extensive prehistoric settlement is known.

An Integrated Combination of Landforms

- The dynamic interaction and juxtaposition between the rolling moorland plateau, the linear glens, the coastal shelf and tidal basin creates a diverse yet integrated landscape composition which is experienced in sequence when travelling along the A9 and from the railway.
- Many small, often linear, settlements lie to the north west of the A9 on the foot-slopes of the interior hills and these enjoy panoramic views out to sea.
- Strongly evident contrasts between the expansive open forms of the moorland plateau, the narrow, enclosed and intimate forms of the glens and straths, the linear coastal fringe with its extensive sea views and the intimate wooded enclosure of the Loch Fleet tidal basin.
- The locally dominant ridgeline of Ben Bhraggie overlooking Loch Fleet and lower lying coastland is emphasised by the monument to the Duke of Sutherland which acts as a focal feature within the southern part of the SLA.

Accessible yet Secluded Glens and Lochs

- The interior is screened by hill landform but occasional views are obtained where glens intersect with the coastal shelf. Readily accessible, sheltered glens pierce the moorland hinterland, offering a sense of seclusion, tranquillity and intimacy from the busier coastal fringe.

- | | |
|--|--|
| Sensitivity to change | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Increased forest cover on the exposed and open moorland could mask and fragment its subtle landform pattern and reduce its consistency of character.▪ Additional large scale features could, in combination with the existing wind farm and overhead electricity line to the west of the SLA, result in views from elevated locations being over a landscape dominated by industrial elements.▪ Additional features within the moorland plateau could compromise the simplicity of the existing landscape character.▪ Additional access tracks within the moorland plateau could reduce its sense of remoteness.▪ Widening of roads within the straths and glens could reduce their sense of seclusion through increasing visitor numbers.▪ Large-scale offshore development which introduce focal features could impinge on panoramic sea views. |
| Potential for landscape enhancement | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Promote natural regeneration of native woodlands along sides of straths and glens.▪ Restructure existing coniferous forests and restock to include native species in areas where hard, straight edges conflict with the sinuous qualities of the moorland hills.▪ Rerouting or under grounding of overhead electricity lines where these are dominant in views from the A9. |

Other**designations/interests**

- Loch Fleet National Nature Reserve. This Reserve includes the enclosed intertidal sand and mud flats of the Loch Fleet basin which host an array of wintering waders and wildfowl whilst the pine wood plantations contain very rare native pinewood ground flora. This site is also a SPA for both the wintering birds and foraging osprey in spring and summer.
- Cambusavie – originally built as an Infectious Diseases Hospital in 1906 and comprised of a number of green and white corrugated iron huts, each isolating a different illness. Little now remains but the surviving buildings are now used (in part) as a Bed and Breakfast.
- Following the minor road to Embo on the south-side of Loch Fleet are the remains of the Dornoch Light Railway that linked Dornoch to the Highland Railway at The Mound junction; it opened in 1902 and closed in 1960. The track (although not the railway) is still visible along with several of the original crossing-keepers cottages (to man the road/rail crossings), one where the Embo road meets the A9 at Cambusmore and a second on the north-side of the A9 at The Mound/Little Torroble road junction.
- Littleferry was the ferry crossing point across Loch Fleet prior to The Mound and grew up around this function. It is a fine collection of early 19th century houses, stores, an ice house and boat sheds typical of a small rural settlement based on a limited fishing/ferry economy.
- Two aircraft crash sites are recorded, of which the remains of a Liberator (crashed in 1944) are still to be seen on the eastern slopes of Beinn Mhealaich.
- A number of aircraft are known to have crashed in amongst the hills that separate Glen Loth and Loch Brora, the remains of which still litter the ground. They including a Barracuda, a Wellington, a Sunderland (the location of the crash marked by a small cairn, constructed in part with some of the wreckage) and a Sea Hawk.
- Included are ten SSSIs. The most relevant being Loch Fleet as described above and Mound Alderwoods (also a SAC) which is impounded by the A9 causeway and comprises alder and willow woodland growing on glacial sediment which has been washed down Strath Fleet. The other SSSIs represent a range of features including important geological outcrops along the rocky foreshore and remnant woodland in the coastal gorges along the coastal shelf.
- Glen Sletdale is thought to be where the last wolf in Scotland was killed.
- Jurassic rocks of the coastal fringe produced a range of fossil finds.

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in: Stanton, C. 1998. Caithness and Sutherland landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 103.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

Citation 10. North West Skye



Insert Map 10

SLA Ref. number/Name	10. North West Skye
Location and Extent	REFER TO MAP FIGURE 10 This large area covers much of Skye's north western peninsulas of Waternish, Duirinish and Minginish, extending from to Waternish Point in the north to Loch Brittle in the south and including Lochs Dunvegan and Loch Bracadale.
Area	537.68km ² (53768.87ha)
Overview	This SLA includes some of the most varied and dynamic scenery to be found within Highland's landscapes. A coastal landscape of dramatic cliffs, and headlands, isolated bays, and intimate beaches contrasts with a stepped moorland interior which often has distinctive hills shaped by their volcanic origins. The complex interplay of land and sea provides an ever-changing sequence of views, many of which extend outwards across the full width of the Minch. The larger sea lochs in this area - Loch Dunvegan and Loch Bracadale, include all these elements and have the added interest of varied offshore islands. The distinctive flat-topped hills of MacLeod's Tables form a prominent local landmark from throughout the SLA, whilst the high cliffs of Moonen Bay and Biod an Athair are visible even from Harris on the other side of the Minch.

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- A sequence of dominant peninsulas separated by deep penetrating sea lochs and bays around the north western coast, creating one of the most varied and dynamic areas of scenery to be found within a Highland coastal landscape.
- The repetitive smooth stepped moorland interior, fashioned by the largest expanse of basaltic lava plateau in Britain, creates a simple landscape composition which contrasts strongly with the variety, intimacy and intricacy of the coastal seascape.
- Extensive sections of remote coastline are dominated by an ever changing pattern of dramatic cliffs, prominent headlands, sea stacks, cobble beaches and sandy bays. There is a varied backcloth of open water, lochs, islands and rising hills.
- Whilst coastal roads in this area provide fine views, much of the area, including some of the most dramatic sections of coastline, is roadless and accessible to most people only by foot.
- The distinctive white coastal and moorland crofting settlements display simple linear geometric patterns which contrast with the dynamic composition between sea and land. These are generally clustered in coastal locations and up the sides of small glens.
- Extensive moorland landscapes only sporadically interspersed with areas of scrub woodland, small plantations and small-scale agricultural fields.
- Frequent large-scale panoramic views over moorland, coastline, small islands, skerries and seascape. The exposure of much of this area to the prevailing west and southwesterly winds, and the changing light conditions, emphasise the interplay between land and sea.

- There is an overriding sense of openness, exposure and a horizontal emphasis of land and seascape, not only due to the distant horizon, but also due to the stepped landform.
- The small-scale settlements which occupy the more sheltered stretches of coast contrast with the remote coastal cliffs which are exposed to the full force of nature.
- Visual detractors in this landscape include the views to wind farms with their large scale man made, moving elements which contrast with the small scale of croft houses. Fish farms are further manmade elements which are visible in coastal views across sheltered inlets. Coastal litter diminishes the enjoyment of some beaches.

Special Qualities

Dynamic Coastline

- The dominant and defining influence is the relationship between land and sea which can be experienced from commanding coastal viewpoints such as Biod an Athair, Idrigill Point, or Oronsay Island, or in intimate corners such as Loch Bharcasaig or the inner reaches of Loch Dunvegan.
- Extensive, unbroken stretches of coastline are accessible only by boat (in calm weather) or on foot. Access along the shore is only available at low tide in some locations.
- The dynamic composition between land, sea and sky creates an ever-changing sequence of dramatic coastal panoramas.
- The variety of coastal features creates a diverse seascape character seen as an ever changing sequence from the meandering coastal roads, tracks and footpaths.
- The impressive sea stacks of MacLeod's Maidens and the small coral beaches at Dunvegan and Glenbrittle are popular attractions.

Distinctive Terrain

- Sequence of dramatic peninsulas separated by deep penetrating sea lochs and large scale complex bays.
- MacLeod's Tables form prominent flat-topped landmarks from within and around the SLA, rising above the generally uniform and low lying moorland landscape. These have a close relationship with Dunvegan Castle, the seat of the Clan Macleod which is a popular visitor attraction.

Crofting landscapes

- The sense of remoteness and tranquillity experienced among the more traditional crofting settlements of Waternish is pronounced due to the fact that access is obtained via a no through road.
- Small-scale dwellings nestle in the shelter of the landscape along the coast or in narrow glens.
- Unish, the most northerly and one of the best preserved examples of the townships on Waternish, is protected as a Scheduled Monument. The majority of these earlier settlements are now abandoned and stand as ruins in the landscape. Interspersed amongst the township ruins are the remains of still older settlement from the Bronze and Iron Ages.
- The cleared settlement bordering Galtrigill to the north is notable in the completeness of its survival.
- Heading along the Waternish peninsula to the north, the settlements predate the apportioned regular layout of their southern neighbours. They are characterised by a cluster of small farmsteads, each with a network of with irregular field systems and enclosures collectively forming small townships with head dykes; with groups of shielings extend up into the surrounding hills.
- The coastal strip overlooking Loch Dunvegan, from Skinidin to Galtrigil, is characterised by an almost unbroken string of crofting townships exhibiting a mixture of linear strip cultivation and a patchwork of sub-rectangular field systems.
- Crofting townships are clustered around Glen Dale which with no distinct boundaries between individual settlements forms an almost continuous ring of crofts around the Glen.
- Harlosh to Bracadale is an almost continuous patchwork of sub-rectangular field systems and small townships. On the peripheries are a number of interesting prehistoric remains, most notably Dun Beag, the well preserved remains of a broch with a burial cairn to the south, and a hillfort to the north.

- At Minginish there are sporadic remains of shielings and the occasional prehistoric roundhouse dotted throughout the hills with a notable concentration along Sleedale Burn, south of Talisker.
- On the lower slopes of the hills overlooking Loch Eynort to the south, there are a network of relic field boundaries, irregular enclosures, and remains of township buildings representing a sizeable depopulated settlement.

Sensitivity to change

- Coastal and marine development which would introduce incongruous man made elements into views over open water or from shore to shore across bays and inlets.
- Buildings or structures in the exposed cliff top landscape which would interrupt the expansive coastal panoramas and vistas from surrounding areas, especially where coastal horizons would be interrupted.
- Further large scale structures which would significantly increase the incidences of such features intruding on coastal and mountain views.
- Settlement expansion which would dilute the traditional linear and scattered settlement patterns or which would alter the balance of scale of individual and groups of dwellings and their relationship with the landscape.
- Additional prominent visual features within the moorland landscape which would compromise the simplicity of the existing landscape quality.
- Increased formal provision of facilities for visitors which would threaten the current relative remoteness experienced outside the existing settlements.
- The appearance of land based marine aquaculture developments including materials and debris.
- Development could impinge on the setting of historic features or landscapes.

Potential for landscape enhancement

- Reinstate areas of post and wire fencing with traditional stone walls and repair walls where dilapidated
- Regeneration of native woodland in combination with removal or redesign of coniferous plantations to reflect landforms.

Other designations/interests

- This SLA borders The Cuillin Hills National Scenic Area (NSA).
- Dunvegan Castle is an inventory of Garden and Designed Landscape and makes a major contribution to the surrounding local scenery.
- A popular story has it that the in order to impress visitors the Chief of the Clan MacLeod dined with them atop Heilabhal Mor (*MacLeod's Tables*), surrounded by torch-carrying clansmen.
- The coastal and inland cliffs of Talisker Site of Special Scientific Interest are designated in part for their volcanic rock formations
- Aird Mhor (Ardmore), just to the west of Trumpan Church (which is an attractive ruin of a medieval church) is the site of a battle which took place between 1530 and 1540. See <http://her.highland.gov.uk/SingleResult.aspx?uid=MHG4836> for a (bloody) account and the recorded location.
- Stein Village conservation area has a collection of attractive white harled (predominantly) 1½ storey terraced houses. It is all that was built of the British Fisheries Society's planned fishing port overlooking Loch Bay (an aborted Telford scheme from the 1790's).
- Borreraig is notable for its association with the MacCrimmon dynasty of pipers and it is here they founded the famous piping college, c.1500, the ruins of which survive.
- At Carbost is the Talisker Distillery which was reconstructed following a fire in 1961
- To the south of Eynort, situated at the head of Loch Eynort are the attractive remains of St. Maelrubha's Chapel; an 18th century ruinous church alongside an earlier equally ruinous chapel.

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in:

Stanton, C. 1996. Skye and Lochalsh landscape assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 71.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

Citation 11. Greshornish



Insert Map 11

**SLA Ref.
number/Name** **11. Greshornish**

Location and Extent REFER TO MAP FIGURE 11.

This area in the inner reaches of Loch Snizort encompasses the small peninsula on the west side of Loch Greshornish, the inlet of Loch Diubaig on its northern side, and the cliffs immediately to the north at Creagan Dearga (*Red Rocks*).

Area 12.44km² (1244.81ha)

Overview This quiet corner of Loch Snizort is small but rich in features and has both intricacy and relatively high relief for its size. It has a complex rocky coast of fine cliffs, sea caves, a natural arch and a secluded bay on the coastal fringe of distinctive stepped moorland interior. The heights of the Greshornish peninsula provide fine vantage points over the large expanse of Loch Snizort and the sheltered and intimate Loch Greshornish. Views from here include the Trotternish and Waternish peninsulas, the moorland heart of central Skye and, in clear conditions, the distant Harris hills.

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- Spectacular rugged outcrop jutting into Loch Snizort with impressive coastal cliffs, carpeted with clinging grasses and heathers, mirrored by the pleated folds at Creagan Dearga which lie below afforested slopes.
- Excellent views to Waternish to the west, Trotternish to the east and, in clear conditions, to Harris to the north.
- The area is accessible, but with sparse settlement and a largely undisturbed character which results in a strong sense of solitude.
- Views towards the SLA from Trotternish feature the wind turbines at Edinbane as a group of evenly spaced moving features on the horizon which contrast with the horizontal emphasis of the landform.
- A further discordant element, in the form of fish farm cages lies in the otherwise open waters of Loch Greshornish and is visible when looking down the loch and across to the peninsula from Kildonan.

Special Qualities

Contrasting Geology, Enclosure and Exposure

- Although accessible on foot, the sheer cliffs of the peninsula and the pleated landform of Creagan Dearga are best appreciated from the sea when they can be seen in combination.
- Seclusion is found within the small scale Diubaig Bay which lies between the sheltering cliffs.
- Sheltered and screened by broadleaf woodland, the gently sloping grazings around Greshornish House and former crofting land give way to more rugged terrain which becomes more dramatic where the coastal geology presents high sheer cliffs and a steep, puckered coastal margin.
- Distinctly defined, stepped moorland presents a varied mosaic of crag, heath and grassland offering alternating sheltered containment and isolated exposure.
- Stimulating views towards the imposing ridges of the adjacent peninsulas.

Cultural Heritage

- At Greshornish there are a number of prehistoric roundhouses, two hillforts, some relic field systems which may also be prehistoric, and the occasional later medieval enclosure and ruined building evident in the landscape.

Sensitivity to change

- Development which could interrupt the expansive views obtained from cliff tops.
- Additional visual features on moorland slopes, headland or within the setting of bays and coastal shore for example telecom masts, wind turbines could detract from the undisturbed character and feeling of isolation.
- Seaward development which would introduce man-made features in long range views or which would dominate the small-scale bay at Loch Diubaig. Further expansion, in terms of scale and height of individual elements, of the existing fish farm in Loch Greshornish.
- Expansion or piecemeal development in and around existing settlement which could jeopardise the inherent secluded character.

Potential for landscape enhancement

- Restructure areas of coniferous plantation and restock including native broadleaf species.
- Improve the appearance of land-based fish farm buildings and materials storage.

Other designations/interests

- Dun na h-Airde on Greshornish Point is listed as a Dun (*fort*)- remains of strategic defensive lookout dating from the time of Viking raids.
- Greshornish Fish Farm is located close to the peninsula on its eastern side, disrupting the naturalness of the coastline.
- The vertical underwater sea cliff off the western side of Greshornish Point is renowned among such dives in Scottish coastal waters for the clarity of the water and consequent visibility.

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in: Stanton, C. 1996. Skye and Lochalsh landscape assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 71. *All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk*

Citation 12. Trotternish and Tianavaig



Insert Map 12

**SLA Ref.
number/Name****12. Trotternish and Tianavaig****Location and Extent**

REFER TO MAP FIGURE 12

This area covers most of the Trotternish peninsula on Skye which lies outwith the National Scenic Area at the peninsula's northeastern end. The regional designation (SLA) takes in the coast of northwest and southeast Trotternish. It also includes the small offshore isles of Fladda-chuain off the northern tip of Skye. At the southern end of the Sound of Raasay it includes the bays at Tianavaig and Balmeanach.

Area337.57km² (33757.81ha)**Overview**

This SLA comprises an extensive and important part of one of the most spectacular landscapes in Britain, valued for its stunning scenery, fascinating geology and impressive, dynamic landforms which reveal a range of distinctive examples of landslip topography. The elevated spine of the Trotternish Ridge dramatically defines contrasting landscapes to its east and west, creating narrow coastal fringes to the peninsula which are equally varied and distinctive. The area includes two of Skye's most distinctive and iconic landscape features – the pinnacle of the Old Man of Storr, and Beinn Tianavaig, whose stepped profile is particularly striking viewed from the southern end of the Sound of Raasay.

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- This area is characterised by a well-defined ridge crest which extends for more than 27 kms and reaches a height of over 600m at several points along its length. From this “spine” of the peninsula the land descends westwards in a gentle dip slope of undulating open moorland whilst to the east lies a steep escarpment accentuated by a sequence of huge rotational landslips.
- The underlying geology of the area creates a dramatic sequence of landform features which are the key defining characteristic, in addition to the peninsula form and coastal surrounds. The most striking features are the pinnacles set away from the main escarpment, such as the Old Man of Storr, which are prominent in views along the coast.
- The dark eastern cliffs are accentuated by the bright green mosses and grasses of their lower slopes which highlight their contrast to the surrounding moorland, crofting settlement and also the simple horizontal emphasis of sea.
- Roads rarely stray from the coastal fringe, giving the upland moorland core a remote and inaccessible character whilst emphasising the connectivity between the peninsula and the sea. This also means that the area seems larger than its actual physical dimensions.
- Settlements cluster along the narrow coastal fringe, or on gentle slopes inland, focussed around small bays or on flatter areas, displaying both traditional linear and scattered crofting patterns with a rugged backcloth of upland moorland, rugged vertical cliffs and narrow pinnacles. Views from settlement vary from exposed and open prospects over open water, or to adjacent islands, to framed seaward views from the protection of sheltered bays.
- Extensive lengths of the coastline in the east are steep and dramatic. However, the area also includes gentle coastal gradients, cliff-girt natural anchorages, and attractive small headlands.

Special Qualities

Dynamic Landslip Character

- One of the most spectacular landscapes in Britain, resulting from a distinct land slip topography that results in a dramatic assemblage of rock outcrops, cliffs and pinnacle features.
- From the ridge crest, a succession of basalt lava layers create a gentle dip slope of undulating open moorland descending westwards to Loch Snizort, whilst to the east, a steep escarpment has been dramatically accentuated by a sequence of gigantic rotational landslips, although some of the best examples of this are also included within the adjacent Trotternish National Scenic Area.
- The dramatic isolated pinnacle of the Old Man of Storr forms a prominent feature along the eastern fringe. It is popular with visitors and frequently portrayed in publicity and media as distinctive Scottish landscape.

Ridgeline Spine and Coastal Fringe

- The Trotternish Ridge, the longest continuous ridge in Skye, forms the backbone of the island's northern peninsula, and dramatically defines and separates the landscape characters to its west and east. Variations in views from the coastal fringe assist in defining the differing characters of the eastern and western sides of the peninsula.
- The ridge is somewhat lower than that of the Cuillins but is still grand in scale and accessible in a wider range of weather conditions. Walking this great ridge in either a northerly or a southerly direction is an exhilarating experience which gives contrasting views – Raasay, Rona and the high peaks of the mainland on one side; broad Loch Snizort and the long profile of the Western Isles on the other.
- The elevated spine of the Trotternish ridge and its associated moorland core results in a narrow coastal fringe where settlements and communication routes are concentrated. Consequently, these have a close relationship with the Minch and the Sound of Raasay from elevated locations above the coastal cliffs, at lower levels overlooking Loch Portree or from the more intimate smaller bay at Tianavaig. The most striking natural features are the pinnacles set away from the main escarpment which are prominent in views along the coastal road.
- The bustling ports of Portree and Uig, from which the ferry to the Western Isles leaves, contrast with the remote interior.
- Uig Bay and Portree Bay are both semi-enclosed bays which are guarded by steep cliffs at their entrances. They offer areas of sheltered anchorage and form an impressive landscape setting for the settlements of Uig and Portree respectively.
- The island of Fladda-chùain and its adjacent skerries, Gaeilavore Island, Gearran Island, and Lord Macdonald's Table are key points of visual reference at a distance of 4-5kms out to sea from the northern tip of Skye due to their isolation and distinctive profiles. These are not only important navigational waymarkers for boats crossing the Minch. They add significantly to the value of seaward views at the north end of the peninsula.
- Steep slopes and cliffs extend along some stretches of relatively undifferentiated coastline, particularly noticeable along the 30 km section of coast between Staffin and Portree. Continuously steep, uninhabited slopes, topped by crags at about 150-250m, present an unbroken and at times forbidding face to the traveller by sea. Natural arches are a particular feature between Tote and Rigg on the east coast of Trotternish

Cultural Heritage

- Throughout North and West Trotternish remains of prehistoric settlement predominantly roundhouses are common, both within the crofting townships and further up into the hills.

Shielings, sometimes with associated enclosures, are also a common feature in the hills and along the rivers and burns away from the townships.

- To the west of Kilvaxter are the remains of the sizable depopulated township of Knockhoe which is interspersed with a number of interesting earlier monuments including a dun and a chambered cairn.

Sensitivity to change

- Development in or around existing settlement areas could disrupt the traditional pattern or be out of scale with existing buildings.
- Development could impinge on the setting of historic features or landscapes.
- Widening or straightening of rural roads here could intrude on the distinct linear space and its relationship to the ridge or could threaten the current sense of relative remoteness. New roads or tracks penetrating into the moorland core would reduce the current sense of remoteness and isolation.
- Development on remote uninhabited areas of coastline could detract from the feeling of tranquillity and isolation or which would impinge on views out to sea or inland towards the ridge.
- Introduction of marine-based installations in nearshore waters could fall within important coastal views or introduce built elements in areas remote from habitation.
- Introduction of focal features could distract from the characteristic linear form of landscape or could divide the linear space and result in variations of vegetation type.
- Development such as woodland or forest could conceal the distinctive underlying landform.
- Large man-made structures outwith the SLA could encroach on panoramic views or affect the perception of scale of the landscape.

Potential for landscape enhancement

- Remove dilapidated fences.
- Provide sensitively located and designed footpaths to improve access to local features.
- Reduce grazing pressure to encourage natural regeneration of native woodland where growing conditions permit.
- Some areas of coniferous plantation have geometric boundaries and associated fences which are incongruous in the landscape. Restructure these to give more organic woodland boundaries and replant to include a significant proportion of native broadleaf trees.
- Relocate or redesign telecommunications masts which are prominent in views.

Other designations/interests

- The Trotternish National Scenic Area (NSA) includes some of the most dramatic and distinctive of the Trotternish landform features. However, it is very limited in extent while the SLA covers the wider Trotternish landscape.
- Kilvaxter and Bornesketaig retain some excellent examples of traditional Skye croft houses most notably at Skye Cottage Museum.
- Trotternish Ridge is of national and European importance (it is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and Special Area of Conservation). These designations recognise the importance of the geology, landslip topography, calcareous upland habitats and scarce arctic-alpine plants which closely relate to the qualities of the SLA.'
- Trotternish Ridge is a SSSI for its geology and landslips. The underlying geology and exposure results in the area also being nationally and internationally important for a variety of calcareous upland habitats and scarce upland unique arctic-alpine plants.
- There is a strong association with Flora Macdonald, who is remembered for her part in helping Bonnie Prince Charlie to escape "over the sea to Skye" from Benbecula. She died in Flodigarry (outside the SLA) but was buried at Kilmuir cemetery, just north of Hungladder, where her grave and memorial can be visited.
- On Fladaigh Chuain lie the remains of St Columba's Chapel. A monk called O'Gorgon, a contemporary of St. Columba had a cell here and is apparently buried near the chapel.
- Unlike many other parts of Skye, evidence for more recent industry is clearly evident in the landscape. Several of the buildings associated with the diatomite works at Lower Tote, including the chimney, still survive on the coast. Storr Lochs Power Station and Dam (built 1952) is also a prominent feature in the landscape. Loch Leathan has increased dramatically in size since the dam was constructed.
- The remains of Duntulm Castle sit on a rocky promontory guarded on three sides by sheer cliffs.
- Prominently located on the cliff-top above Uig Bay is "Captain Fraser's Folly".

Landscape Character The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in:
Stanton, C. 1996. Skye and Lochalsh landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 71.
All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

Citation 13. Raasay and Rona



Insert Map 13

AVLG Ref. numer/Name	13. Raasay and Rona
Location and Extent	<p>REFER TO MAP FIGURE 13.</p> <p>This area lies between the Sound of Raasay and the Inner Sound and includes those parts of Raasay which lie to the east of the central ridge between Mannish Point, Dun Caan and North Fearn, the northern end of the island (from Brochel and Arnish northwards), the island of Rona and surrounding small islands and skerries.</p>
Area	127.45Km ² (12744.61 hectares)
Overview	<p>This diverse SLA occupies a unique position in the range of islands off the west coast of Scotland by virtue of the fact that, due to its location between the Isle of Skye and the mainland, it offers particularly good panoramic views. These include intricate foreground features, coastal waters and open sea and to the large-scale mountain ranges of Skye, Torridon and Kintail and, in clear conditions, also to the distant Western Isles.</p> <p>The ruggedness, isolation, and slender shape of most of the island of Raasay is integral to its landscape character and appeal. These characteristics intensify towards the north of the island (though the average height of the land gradually diminishes in this direction) as it tapers to a fine, curving point at An Caol and Eilean Tigh. The rugged and intimate Lewisian Gneiss topography of the north end of Raasay continues on Rona giving both these areas (atypically) a flavour of the Outer Hebrides though they are firmly set between Skye and the mainland.</p>

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- The hilly and often intricate topography of this area offers many different vantage points from which to fully appreciate the diverse range of fore, mid and background features. Panoramic views are obtained over small bays, kyles and inlets, coastal cliffs and open sea to distant hills and immediately identifiable mountain peaks with marked contrasts in scale and proportion.
- The large-scale, continuously steep and predominantly wild, east-facing slopes of the southern part of the area are a key feature. In contrast to this, the Lewisian Gneiss geology from around Loch Arnish northwards, has produced a more intricate coastline and more intimate topography of rocky hills, hollows, coastal inlets and skerries.
- In the sheltered depressions, which were protected from glacial scouring by the narrow north-south ridge which stretches the length of the SLA, small pockets of deep soil enabled crofting activity in what is an otherwise remote and 'unforgiving' environment. There are poignant remnants of this lifestyle in the form of ruined buildings and enclosures which are gradually being subsumed by bracken and native woodland cover. These relics of crofting provide a mosaic of colour and detail within the predominant moorland cover with knobbly rock outcrops.
- There are relatively sheltered west and northwest facing bays with little or no habitation, steep coastlines and only occasional landing places which reinforce the sense of remoteness and isolation. Now very sparsely settled, the landscape is reverting to natural woodland cover in some sheltered areas of deeper soils particularly where the deer and sheep numbers have been reduced.

Special Qualities

Outstanding Mix of Island Coastal Features and Views

- Panoramic 360 degree views are available over the intricate foreground features and open waters to a jagged skyline encompassing the Cuillin and Torridonian mountains which are seldom seen from elsewhere in combination. Views include iconic mountains such as Liathach, Beinn Eigh, the Five Sisters, The Cuillins, Glamaig and Trotternish.
- In clear visibility conditions, views extend even further with the outline of Lewis being visible beyond Skye. The relatively modest heights of the summit points on Raasay and Rona, which must be ascended to obtain the most uninterrupted of views, act to emphasise the large scale, variety and quality of the scene.
- Intermittent views of the islands and the mainland are obtained from within the enclosed low-lying depressions which interrupt the central high spine of the islands.
- The hilly and often intricate topography of this area offers many different vantage points from which to fully appreciate the diverse range of fore, mid and background features. These include small bays, kyles and inlets, coastal cliffs, open sea, distant hills and immediately identifiable mountain peaks with marked contrasts in scale and proportion.
- From the many vantage points from which panoramic views to distant mountains are obtained, the linearity of Raasay and Rona is also apparent and strong visual relationship with the parallel peninsulas of Trotternish and Applecross is evident.
- Views of the islands' profiles; including the distinctive flat summit of Dun Caan which serves as a prominent landmark, are obtained from northeast Skye, Applecross, the Sound of Raasay and the Inner Sound.

Exposure, Remoteness and accessibility

- The area comprises highly exposed summits and coastlines with contrasting shelter from the elements and enclosure within low lying locations.
- There is a strong feeling of remoteness throughout the area. This is emphasised by the reliance on boats, the 'no through' road on Raasay, the absence of roads on Rona and the inaccessibility of the eastern coast of Raasay. Much of the area is not visible from public roads and is only seen either from the sea or by hiking over rugged terrain.

Geological and Historical Diversity

- The volcanic plug of Dun Caan is an unmistakable landmark from viewpoints within the SLA and also from seaward locations, the mainland and Skye. Below it lie the 300m high sheer cliffs with long horizontal bands of rock, scree and boulders with relatively lush vegetation. The horseshoe bay of Loch Arnish marks the junction between the Torridonian sandstones which make up the southern part of Raasay, and the Lewisian gneiss, uncommon in the Inner Hebrides. In exception to the general rule that Lewisian gneiss produces infertile land this area is characterised by fine woodland of birch and rowan which shelters and surrounds the crofts at Arnish.
- The Lewisian gneiss topography at the northern end of Raasay and on Rona provides produced a more intricate coastline and more intimate topography of rocky hills, hollows, coastal inlets and skerries providing an unusual taste of the Outer Hebridean landscape experience in the context of the Inner Hebrides.
- The combination of Torridonian sandstone and Lewisian gneiss gives rise to a diverse and distinctive series of geological features and vegetation cover.
- The dramatic remains of Brochel Castle rises seamlessly from its rocky pinnacle forming a distinctive and imposing historical landmark.

Sensitivity to change

- Large scale buildings and structures could detract from panoramic views by introducing dominant visual foci in the fore or mid ground.
- Buildings or structures in elevated locations where the distinctive ridgeline profile could be interrupted.
- Buildings or structures could impinge on the setting of archaeological interests, including remnants of past crofts.
- Improved access facilities could threaten the experience of isolation and remoteness.
- Houses in remote locations, accessed by boat, could seriously compromise the special wilderness recreational value.
- Additional tracks could detract from the feeling of remoteness and/or break up the linear form of the landscape.
- New or expanded marine aquaculture developments where this could increase the size of existing developments or introduce new foci, lighting and noise into views. The area is particularly sensitive where the scale of the land and seascape is small and intimate and where there is a sense of tranquillity and/ or remoteness.
- The coastal area is particularly sensitive where the scale of the land and seascape is small and intimate and where there is a sense of tranquillity and/ or remoteness – as in the northern parts of the area. However, the untrammelled section of larger-scale coastal landscape between Brochel and Beinn na Leac is also sensitive. New or expanded marine installations in these areas could compromise their character and possibly introduce new foci, lighting or sources of noise.
- Appearance of fishfarms and the presence of shore line debris and materials.
- The condition and appearance of low key visitor facilities such as parking areas, signposts and interpretation boards.
- The condition and appearance of small scale pier facilities

Potential for landscape enhancement

- Improve the condition of existing paths to deter foot and cycle traffic from adopting alternative routes in parallel.
- Remove redundant fence wire and posts.

Other designations/interests

- Raasay Site of Special Scientific Interest runs along the east coast of the island and encompasses nationally important examples of the varied geology of the island and the associated upland, woodland and freshwater habitats.
- There is a rare example of a self-built road extending for 1-¾ miles from Brochel Castle to Arnish. The story of this and one man's determination to save his native community from further depopulation is told in the book 'Calum's Road'.
- Johnson and Boswell visited Raasay in 1773 and wrote a short description of the islands. They noted the importance of Dun Caan as a landmark to seafarers and remarked that Rona had "...so Rocky a soil that it appears to be a pavement".
- The poet Sorley Maclean (1911-1996) was born on Raasay and his poem Hallaig is an evocative description of the landscape and its human historical dimension..
- Located around both Rona and Raasay are a number of rock shelters which have been identified with very early prehistoric (Mesolithic) seasonal occupation.
- Many people evicted from Raasay in the 1850's settled in Rona increasing the population of the island to about 400. There are three main settlements on the island, the largest of which is Acarsaid Thioram. Amongst the ruins are the school, the mission church and manse. Prior the construction of the church in 1912 the islanders worshipped in Uaimh an Fhuamhair (giant's cave) on the east side of the island; the pulpit was a stone pillar, the font was a natural hollow fed by water dripping from the cave roof and the pews were boulders. At the southern end of the island is the ruin of an early Christian chapel and burial ground. The lighthouse and keepers cottage at the northern end was built in 1857.

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types which are found in this area are described in:

Stanton, C. 1996. Skye and Lochalsh Landscape Assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 71.

Available at www.snh.org.uk

Citation 14. Kyle and Plockton



Insert Map 14

SLA Ref. number/Name	14. Kyle and Plockton
Location and Extent	<p>REFER TO MAP FIGURE 14.</p> <p>This section of coast stretches from the immediate vicinity of the Skye Bridge at Kyle of Lochalsh to include Plockton and the south side of outer Loch Carron west of Portchullin. It includes the many small islands and skerries which lie close to the shore in this area.</p>
Area	18.12km ² (1812.90ha)
Overview	<p>This is a tranquil stretch of intricate, mainly low-lying coastline scattered with nearshore islands and skerries, and smooth sandy bays. Inland from the shore, moorland is punctuated by rocky outcrops and hamlets with white cottages. The picturesque village of Plockton and the busy town of Kyle are focal points for visitors.</p> <p>The backdrop to this area (or put another way, the outlook from it) encompasses a diverse array of headlands and islands – large, medium and small in scale – where four major sea inlets - Loch Carron, Loch Kishorn, the Inner Sound and Loch Alsh - all meet..The distant views across water to prominent hills and mountains on Skye, Raasay, and in Applecross are distinctive and strongly influenced by weather, light and tidal conditions. They are an attractive feature of journeys by road and rail into this area and across the Skye Bridge.</p>

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- The Intricate landform forms sheltered pockets at varying elevations and with a range of orientations which offer a changing experience travelling through the landscape.
- Small harbour settlements are scattered along the coast.
- Inland landcover is dominated by undulating moorland with abundant gorse, frequent exposures of the distinctive Torridonian Sandstone, and pockets of mixed broadleaf and coniferous woodland
- Views across water to the prominent skylines of the Torridon and Cuillin mountains contrast with the small scale foreground detail of the numerous islands, bays and inlets.
- This is a complex coastline animated by skerries and outcrops, tidal fluctuations and ever changing weather and visibility conditions. Areas of sand are revealed at low tide to provide transitory links between islands and generous expanses of beach in a diverse series of bays.

Special Qualities

Intricate Coastline and Picturesque Vistas

- The village of Plockton is notable for the arrangement of cottages aligned along a palm tree lined road which hugs the gentle curve of the sheltered bay on the eastern side of a protective headland. Plockton is a long orderly model village, surveyed and planned for Hugh Innes in 1801. There are many very attractive predominantly 3-bay early 19th century houses. The scene is enlivened by the presence of numerous skerries and boat activity, and overlooked by the imposing Duncraig Castle.
- Kyle of Lochalsh provides a focus of activity and vibrancy which contrasts with the tranquillity of Plockton particularly in the winter months.
- The Dingwall to Kyle of Lochalsh railway line acts as a physical and visual boundary to the area and affords travellers a stimulating sequence of intricate coastal views across the loch to southern Applecross. Tourist activity is focused on the natural beauty and cultural heritage of the area's land and seascapes and promotes a healthy approach to conserving and promoting the quality and condition of the natural resource
- Impressive blankets of gorse scattered moorland punctuated by rocky outcrops and trees highlighted with bright croft houses and surrounded by the contrasting scale of the spectacular mountains of Wester Ross and the Cuillins.
- The Skye Bridge is a notable (and some would say graceful) engineering structure in a national context, an important threshold for the traveller to or from Skye, and it also provides unique elevated views of the attractive coastal setting.

Sensitivity to change

- Large scale buildings or structures could detract from the intimate, intricate scale of the coast.
- Development which would introduce activity and noise could threaten the tranquillity of the area.
- Marine based development which could detract from the pattern of small islands and skerries.
- Additional or upgraded roads or access tracks could detract from the quiet nature of existing roads. Widening or straightening the roads may attract more through-traffic and this, along with construction of new tracks, could reduce the tranquillity of the area.
- Development could obstruct, or impinge on, views from the road towards the coast, islands and open water.
- Removal of woodland could result in the loss of shelter and reduce the diversity of experience of enclosure and exposure.

Potential for landscape enhancement

- Remove or redesign coniferous plantations to better reflect landforms and other landscape features while maintaining the shelter afforded to Plockton.
- Manage woodland and roadside shrubs to maintain or create views to the coast to alternate with areas of enclosure.
- Seek to minimise the visual impact of the rock armour used for future works on the railway line and other infrastructure projects.
- Remove unsuitable roadside signage

Other designations/interests

- Plockton, originally called Am Ploc, was a crofting hamlet until the end of the early 1800s when the landlord, Sir Hugh Innes cleared tenants from inland areas with an option to resettle in the expanded fishing port.
- Plockton's place on the tourist map was firmly established by the BBC drama series 'Hamish Macbeth'.
- Eilean Ban lighthouse is by Stevenson, built 1857. The keepers cottages were converted by the author Gavin Maxwell (of Ring of Brightwater fame) in 1968. Maxwell died before he could turn Eilean Ban into a commercial Eider breeding colony. The house has recently been restored and is now a small museum.
- Plock of Kyle site of a WWII heavy anti-aircraft battery, consisting of two 3 inch guns and an accommodation camp. The battery has now gone, but many of the hut bases survive.
- The railway connection from Strome Ferry to Kyle of Lochalsh (about 10 ½ miles) cost £200,000 – in proportion to its length the most expensive stretch of railway ever constructed in Britain. A considerable amount of explosives were used to cut through the rocky landscape and a number of the stores used to house the explosives survive alongside the railway
- The Skye Bridge which provides an easy route to and from Skye but was the subject of controversy before, during and after construction largely regarding the requirement for high toll payments.
- The 63 miles of railway from Dingwall to Kyle of Lochalsh was opened in 1897 after a lengthy and expensive construction period which required the building of numerous bridges and substantial sections of rock cutting.
- A number of rare marine habitats recognised in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan thrive in the shallows and inlets around the coast including maerl beds, seagrass beds and rafts of crofters wig seaweed.
- Kenneth Mackenzie, the Brahan Seer reputedly predicted that *'The day will come when long strings of carriages without horses shall run between Dingwall and Inverness, and more wonderful still, between Dingwall and the Isle of Skye.'*

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in:

Stanton, C. 1996. Skye and Lochalsh landscape assessment.

Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 71.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

Citation 15. South West Applecross and Crowlin Islands



Insert Map 15

SLA Ref. number/Name	15. South-west Applecross and Crowlin Islands
Location and Extent	<p>REFER TO MAP FIGURE 15.</p> <p>This area covers the southwestern margins of the Applecross peninsula – the part of the mainland coast (with its adjacent skerries) which runs from Milton to just east of Uags, the nearby Crowlin Islands, and the intervening stretch of sea at Caolas Mór.</p>
Area	38.85km ² (3885.69ha).
Overview	<p>This remote area of intimate coastal inlets and crofting settlements, and big views across the sea to Skye and Raasay is accessible only via the long winding coastal road from Torridon or over the tortuous Bealach na Ba. The white cottages which hug hillsides, harbour edges and shorelines overlook sheltered bays, outstretched promontories, skerries and islands. Impressive panoramic views of distant islands and mountain skylines are influenced by light and weather conditions creating an ever-changing backdrop to the coastal landscape. The uninhabited Crowlin Islands are important visual “stepping stones” in the southwesterly views across the Inner Sound towards Scalpay and the Cuillins. They also offer a tranquil haven for those who make the journey by boat.</p>

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- The tranquil, coastal crofting landscape is animated with white cottages, colourful boats and its dynamic relationship with the sea in contrast to the uninhabited islands and remote moorland areas. The intricate coastline of sheltered bays, exposed headland and islands and skerries are influenced by tidal fluctuations and ever changing weather and visibility conditions.
- Attractive white cottages and houses lie along the rugged coastline, nestling around sheltered bays and harbours, or lining up at the edge of improved grazings and inbye land, at the base of moorland slopes. The variety of settlement pattern tends to be directly related to the local landform and ground conditions.
- Away from the main road there is little evidence for human occupation or influence on the landscape, with the exception of the occasional shieling hut, rock shelter, and a series of paths and tracks that link the small number of disparate, now-depopulated, townships.
- Shallow harbours and bays drain completely at low tide and have a vibrant relationship of land and sea, temporarily marooning anchored boats and, in places, exposing bright coral beaches.
- Rugged Torridonian moorland, scattered with trees, scrub, rocky outcrops and boulders, forms a pronounced edge between land and sea.
- Deserted villages and dwellings are a common feature in the more isolated locations in the south of the area and are a reminder of the past hard way of life of evicted families reliant on pasturing sheep, gathering kelp and fishing.
- The surrounding sea is dominant in views which tend to be focused along the coast and out over focal features such as islands, skerries, bays and settlements rather than to the interior.
- From elevated locations, and most of the coast, there are extensive clear seaward views to neighbouring islands and distinctive mountain profiles.
- From the uninhabited islands and skerries, and from boats moving along the shore, views are over an array of islands, skerries, promontories and bays back clothed by rising moorland

slopes.

- The experience of this landscape and views is heavily influenced by weather and light conditions which range from conditions of heavy rain and low cloud which renders the islands to the west invisible, to crystalline conditions where the detail of distant features, such as the cliffs of Raasay become distinct.
- Sunsets are made more spectacular by the backlighting of the exceptional profiles of Skye and Raasay.
- Areas of improved pasture and small arable fields afford contrast with the dominantly rugged moorland and coast and enrich the sequence of changing views and vistas.

Special Qualities

Intricate Coast

- The northwest-facing craggy bays of Poll Creadha and Poll Domhain are defended by rocky islands while the long, deep, south-facing Loch Toscaig is sheltered by flanking hillsides.
- Although there is less reliance on the sea for transport links and people's livelihoods than in past times, there remain a number of harbours, piers, jetties and anchorages which remain in use.
- The two main Crowlin islands, Eilean Meadhonach and Eilean Mór sit side-by-side forming a natural harbour which is no more than a narrow rock alleyway a mile long with a linking shingle spit at the southern end. This feature is invisible to viewers from the mainland. It reveals itself only to those who visit the islands by boat or fly over them.
- The southwest corner of the Applecross peninsula is roadless and largely trackless with no habitable buildings other than at Uags. The Crowlin Islands have similar qualities of wildness and are further isolated by the intervening stretch of sea at Caolas Mór.

Impressive Panoramic Views

- From elevated locations, and most of the coast, there are extensive clear views over the Inner Sound to outlying islands and the rugged or mountainous skylines of Raasay, Rona and Skye. Views of the distinctive flat-topped Dun Caan on Raasay have the mountains of Skye as a backdrop.
- The experience is heavily influenced by weather and light conditions which range from conditions of heavy rain and low cloud which render the Raasay and Skye invisible, to crystalline conditions where the detail of the sea cliffs on Raasay can be picked out.
- Impressive panoramic views across sheltered waters to outlying islands and mountainous skylines together with inspiring sequential views and vistas throughout undulating rocky moorland and areas of tree cover.
- Remote coastline and rocky moorland provides isolation close to the sea edge and exclusive open views.
- The coastal road to Ard-Dhubh (*black point*) gives views across the waters of Poll Creadha northeast to Camusterrach and the Applecross mountains beyond.
-

- Sensitivity to change**
- Development between the road and the coast could impinge on seaward views.
 - Large scale buildings or structures could detract from the pattern of settlements and contrast with the generally small scale houses and cottages.
 - Development on prominent elevated locations could introduce a new settlement pattern unrelated to existing patterns.
 - Marine development which would introduce man made geometric features could detract from views of the array of islands and skerries which lie close to the coast. If located in or close to the sheltered inlets, such installations could impede navigation.
 - New roads or tracks, or the widening or straightening of the existing ones, could detract from the feeling of history, isolation and tranquillity.
 - Any buildings or structures could impinge on the setting of historic features.
 - Formal provision for visitors in remote bays and promontories where these could detract from the experience of remoteness and tranquillity.

Potential for landscape enhancement

- Sensitive management and expansion of native tree cover where growing conditions permit.
- Repair and reinstatement of boundaries to crofting lands and improvement/reintroduction of management of these areas.
- Improvement of the condition of existing footpaths where traffic seeking alternative, drier paths has resulted in 'braiding'.

Other designations/interests

- Applecross is one of the earliest centres of Christianity, second only to Iona, in Scotland. In 673 AD, Monk Maelrubha alighted on the southern shores of the peninsula and established a monastery, declaring the surrounding area a sanctuary – called A'Chomraich.
- The remote Applecross peninsula is accessed most directly via the road over the Bealach na Ba (pass of the cattle). The route, completed in 1975, follows the line of an old drove road and with its crest at nearly 600m above sea level, it represents the highest pass in Scotland. Until 1950 the road was still rough gravel and before that access was by foot or boat. However, then Applecross was a thriving crofting and fishing township. Clearances and lack of opportunity drove people out and the remains of buildings can be seen scattered throughout much of the area.
- Between 1810 and 1920 the Crowlin Islands provided homes for several families evicted by Laird Mackenzie from Applecross, but unwilling to take passage from Scotland.
- Caolas Mor is simply a glaciated valley that happens to be below sea level and thus divides the Crowlin Islands from the mainland.
- Toscaig once had a ferry service to Kyle of Lochalsh.
- Seals, dolphins, whales and other marine mammals are commonly sighted in the Inner Sound.
- Remote Uags appeared in the episode 'In Search of a Rose' which formed part of the Hamish Macbeth television series.

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in: McIlveen, F. 1999. Ross and Cromarty landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 119.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

Citation 16. Strathconon, Monar and Mullardoch



Insert Map 1

**SLA Ref.
number/Name**

16. Strathconon, Monar and Mullardoch

Location and Extent

An extensive area of interior hill country at the head of Strathconon, upper Glen Strathfarrar, and Glen Cannich, including the catchments of Loch Monar and Loch Mullardoch.

The area extends from Glen Carron, upper Strathconon, and Gleann Meinich in the north, to Glen Elchaig and the watershed between Loch Mullardoch and Glen Affric in the south. The western boundary takes in Coulags in Strath Carron, Bendronaig Lodge in the Attadale area, and Killilan at the head of Loch Long. The eastern boundary includes Strathconon upstream of Milton, and the headwaters of the River Orrin. It takes in Glen Strathfarrar upstream of Loch Beannacharan and includes a short (3 km) stretch of lower Glen Affric near the eastern end of Loch Beinn a' Mheadhoin.

Area

924.46km² (92446 Hectares)

Overview

This area includes a vast unbroken tract of remote interior hills and is the largest such area north of the Great Glen, with mountain summits and glens remote from roads and human habitation.

The spectacular large scale, continuous mountain ridges are intercut with parallel long, deep sinuous glens which offer strongly contrasting experiences of dramatic open scenery with the tranquillity and intimacy of the middle and lower valley floors with their small scale medley of birch and pine woods, rivers, lochans, wetlands and grassland.

The western part of the SLA includes a large section of Strathcarron which comprises a wide floodplain, wooded in part, and a wooded hill and mountain backdrop. The strath includes a strategic road and railway serving the west coast along which are clusters of settlement.

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- Extensive tract of moorland which is difficult to access, largely uninhabited and consequently possesses wild land qualities. Deeply dissected mountain massif with mountain ridges on a grand scale with continuous narrow crests.
- Relatively uniform low land cover on hill slopes and summits, dominated at higher elevations by intact mosaics of montane heaths, grasses, and mosses, render this a very open and highly exposed landscape in contrast to the partly wooded strath and floodplain in the west.
- Large scale water bodies extend deep into remote hill country
- Major glens, with many interlocking and overlapping spurs, defining a distinctive sequence of alternating enclosed and expansive views for road users.
- Small but significant remnants of Caledonian Pinewood, reinforced by natural regeneration schemes, contributing to a greater diversity of land cover within the glens and western strath; including semi-natural broadleaved woodland on river banks and steep-sided gullies, occasional, unfenced pasture grassland on the strath floor river flats, and mature, predominantly coniferous plantations.
- Evidence for previous occupation is relatively common on the shallow slopes of the glens and straths, and on the floodplains of the larger rivers where the remains of buildings, small farmsteads, enclosures and numerous, sometimes extensive boundary dykes can be seen.
- Few buildings or structures in the interior, with the exception of the major dams and their ancillary infrastructure, the most prominent being sporting estate lodges, sometimes with

associated cottages and smallholdings.

- Strong contrasts in visual characteristics between the enclosed middle and lower glens, the more open upper glens and reservoirs, the expansive mountain ridges and summits and the wide strath in the west.
- Draw-down scars have formed on the shorelines of the two major reservoirs and some access tracks are widely visible in clear conditions, including from neighbouring peaks. These human impacts tend to detract from the sense of wildness of some parts of the interior, where otherwise it would be very marked. However, the scale and generally undeveloped character of the area is such that a strong sense of wildness still pervades most of it and the human impacts are not irreversible given a long enough time frame. In the northwestern part of the area, the main road and railway line through Glen Carron and Strath Carron are prominent in sequential views
- By far the most significant human impact on the landscape in this area has resulted from the damming of lochs for hydro-electric power.

Special Qualities

Grand Mountain Ridges, Long Glens and Wide Strath

- A series of grand, broadly parallel, high mountain ridges, separated by long, sinuous, steep-sided glens and straths combine to form a landscape of immense scale where elements are experienced in sequence.
- Marked contrasts between the bare, dramatic scenery of the ridges and upper glens - exaggerated by the huge scale of lochs Monar and Mullardoch - and the more tranquil and intimate qualities of the valley floors, with their patchworks of grassland, bog, birch and pine wood, river and lochan.
- Distinctive sequential changes in visual and landscape qualities travelling along glens reflect the transition from lowland strath to mountain interior.
- Intimate sequential travelling experience on the A890 through Strathcarron with ever changing enclosure and exposure and views to adjacent features.
- Contrasting deep, steep-sided glens and wide, wooded straths on the eastern and western periphery.

Wildness and Remoteness

- A very strong sense of wildness and remoteness, typically sparked by long journey from the east along winding single-track roads to the head of the glen, emphasised by the sparse network of rough, isolated paths and tracks, and the spectacular summit views over vast expanses of moorland. Reservoir draw down scars compromise the sense of wildness within the interior.
- The mountain interior and upper reaches of the glens are out of sight of public roads, remote from any habitation, and are among the most remote areas of mainland Britain. The presence of road and rail links within Strathcarron however render this area markedly less remote than those areas to the east.
- Extensive areas of hill slopes and summits dominated by intact mosaics of montane heaths, grasses, and mosses contrast with the afforested side slopes and partly wooded flood plain at Strathcarron.
- Important remnants of native Caledonian pinewood.
- Challenging mountain terrain ideally suited to adventurous ridge-walks, with potential for longer coast-to-coast journeys.
- Very popular with hill walkers, including a high number of Munro mountains in close proximity. Also, given the large extent of the area and the limited accessibility, some wild camping in the area.

Sensitivity to change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plantation forestry outwith glens and straths could detract from the subtle changes in land use and land cover. ▪ Increased hydro-electric infrastructure, including further buildings or pylons could further erode the existing qualities of remoteness and wildness. ▪ Large-scale development outwith this SLA but visible from it could also detract from the wild qualities and sense of remoteness. ▪ Additional roads or tracks which could introduce visual scarring. ▪ New fences and ditches could introduce inappropriate linear features on hill sides and valley floors. ▪ Buildings in remote or visually exposed locations could dilute the remote and wild qualities experienced in the interior. ▪ Development which could obstruct framed views along main axis of glens, or alter the sequence and balance of open and enclosed views. ▪ Formal provision for visitors within glens could increase visitor numbers and related car traffic/car parking pressure. This could make the human presence more pronounced and detract from the area's wildness and tranquility. ▪ Road improvements, including road widening and realignment, could reduce the intimacy currently experienced when travelling at low speeds through glens and straths.
Potential for landscape enhancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Re-structuring of some existing forest plantations and (re)establishment of native vegetation. ▪ Regeneration and/or planting of other native woodland e.g. birch/oak eg in steep gorges and gullies. ▪ There are opportunities to restore/recreate the network of stalkers' paths which were interrupted by the flooding of the valleys for hydro power generation. This could be particularly worthwhile in the Loch Mullardoch area where there are a number of remote Munros on both sides of the loch and potential for a through-route to Glen Elchaig.
Other designations /interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Very significant degree of overlap between the SLA and the SNH Search Area for Wild Land which extends slightly further to the west and south-west. ▪ Parts of the boundary run contiguously with adjoining NSAs (north: Wester Ross NSA; south: Glen Affric NSA; east: Glen Strathfarrar NSA; and west: Kintail NSA). ▪ At the head of Glen Strathfarrar (c.1963), one of the most elegant major dams constructed. A second major dam was constructed in 1952 at the eastern end of Loch Mullardoch with a tunnel over 3 miles long connecting the dam to Fasnakyle power station via Loch Beinn a' Mheadhoin. ▪ Strathglass Complex SAC [Affric – Cannich Hills and Glen Strathfarrar SSSIs].

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in:

Ferguson McIlveen. 1999. Ross and Cromarty landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 119

Stanton, C. 1996. Skye and Lochalsh landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 71.

Environmental Resources Management. 1998. Lochaber landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 97.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

Citation 17. Ben Wyvis



Insert Map 17

SLA Ref. number/Name **17. Ben Wyvis**

Location and Extent REFER TO MAP FIGURE 17.

This area covers the rounded summits and foothills of Ben Wyvis from the southern shores of Loch Glass in the north-east to Little Wyvis in the south-west. The SLA does not include the lower slopes of Ben Wyvis which have long been dominated by forestry, geared almost exclusively to intensive timber production. However, it is acknowledged that restructuring of these forests to improve their amenity could bring potential for some enlargement of this SLA in the future.

Area 76.80km² (7680.25ha).

Overview Ben Wyvis is a substantial hill massif with an area above 900m covering several square kilometres, a broad, relatively level summit ridge more than 7 kms long, and several corries which hold snow until the spring. It is somewhat isolated from the main mountain areas to the west and north, so its bulk and profile make it a dominant landmark in the inner Moray Firth area, visible from many surrounding locations. Views from its summit are both extensive and varied. Unusually for a Munro, the nearby views include substantial areas of arable land, an industrial port (Invergordon) and often also marine drilling rigs (which visit the Cromarty Firth for repair and decommissioning).

Ben Wyvis is an important part of the wider landscape setting for settlements in the inner Moray Firth, not least Inverness. Here some of the most iconic views downriver from the city centre feature Wyvis as a backdrop and over the year the changing colours of the hill act as a visual marker of the changing seasons for local residents.

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- Ben Wyvis stands in an isolated position, forming a dominant ‘whaleback’-shaped landmark in the landscape, especially when viewed from the south. The broad ridge and gently ascending upper slopes surmount the very steep middle slopes of Ben Wyvis. The nature of these slopes means that the summit of the mountain is concealed from view from locations at or near its base.
- From the west, Ben Wyvis appears as a flat-topped mountain with unbroken uniform grassy slopes falling steeply to dense forest plantations. From the east, its character is defined by a series of high, deep, craggy corries extending into the upper slopes and containing lochans and fast flowing rocky burns.
- The flat open summit is carpeted in yellow-green woolly hair moss, forming one of the largest continuous expanses in the country and producing a distinctive character to the summit plateau. On the lower slopes, uniform blankets of heather, grassland and heath emphasise the simple, rounded profile of the mountain.
- Existing plantations appear incongruous in the surrounding landscape, especially when seen from the mountain top, due to their contrast of colour, shape, line and texture. Collectively, these seem to almost encircle the mountain.

Special Qualities

Dominant Landmark and Uninterrupted Panoramas

- Standing well above a surrounding range of much lower foothills, Ben Wyvis has a commanding presence with its broad and fairly level summit ridge stretching more than 7kms from Garbat to Loch Glass. It is a dominant landmark feature from many locations, most notably from the south and northwest, including Inverness and the Black Isle. Little Wyvis also appears prominent at a local level
- The summit of Ben Wyvis provides some of the most extensive panoramas in Scotland. These include the wild and dramatic mountain profiles of Wester Ross and Sutherland to the north and west, the indented coastline and settled, fertile lowlands of Easter Ross and the Black Isle to the east, and the distant summits of the Cairngorms and Ben Nevis to the south.
- Views of the top and the overall profile of the mountain are limited from the immediate surroundings, due to its massive scale and convex upper slopes. The form of the mountain is most clearly appreciated when viewed from a distance, for example from Inverness and the Black Isle.
- Ben Wyvis is a popular Munro due in part to its proximity to Inverness but also because it is a relatively straightforward walk with a broad, easy ridge from which the panoramic views can be appreciated. It is also popular for cross-country ski-ing.
- With the exception of Wyvis Lodge, the odd shieling hut, and the very occasional boundary wall and rough track there is virtually no visible evidence of human occupation in the SLA.

Sensitivity to change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expansion of built elements or blocks of contrasting vegetation, such as coniferous plantations, which would detract from the exposed open grassy slopes. ▪ The construction of linear features which would introduce discordant, angular man-made elements into the exposed mountain and moorland landscape. ▪ The introduction of man-made objects on open, exposed slopes which would interrupt the expansive panoramas. ▪ Additional wind farm development in surrounding areas, particularly to the north and west, could adversely affect the quality of existing panoramic views by introducing large-scale, moving, man-made objects into a landscape which has strong qualities of remoteness and wildness.
Potential for landscape enhancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Outwith the SLA boundary, the harvesting of the existing coniferous forests on its western, southern and eastern fringes, brings the opportunity for creating a richer woodland mosaic and opening up pathways and views through the forest area. Restocking selected areas with high or higher proportions of native broadleaved trees, and the application of current best forest design practice, would create a better setting to the open grass slopes of Ben Wyvis. ▪ Remove existing linear features which contrast with the open and simple land cover, such as fences or paths. Restore and maintain the main access route to eliminate the 'braiding' effects of walkers seeking alternative, parallel routes.
Other designations/interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ben Wyvis is a National Nature Reserve (NNR), Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area (SPA) and SSSI. The woolly hair moss summit is relevant to these designations ▪ The programme of past forest expansion has diluted the special qualities of this area but there is scope, through current and future forest restructuring, to reverse this trend whilst still maintaining much of the surrounding land in productive use. ▪ Listed Building (category A, Wyvis Lodge, Stables and Game Larders) built 1886 for Walter Shoolbred, head of a London firm of cabinet makers (later Maples).
Landscape Character	<p>The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in: Ferguson McIlveen. 1999. Ross and Cromarty landscape character assessment. <u>Scottish Natural Heritage Review</u> No 119.</p> <p><i>All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk</i></p>

18. Fannichs, Braemore, Freevater and Glen Calvie



Insert Map 18

SLA Ref. number/Name **18. Fannichs, Braemore, Freevater and Glen Calvie**

Location and Extent REFER TO MAP FIGURE 18

This SLA covers an extensive area of mountains and moorland on both sides of the main Garve-Ullapool road along the Dirrie More stretch between Loch Glascarnoch and the head of Loch Broom. It includes the range of hills south of the road commonly known as the Fannichs along with the loch of that name. To the north of the road it takes in a wider sweep of country: Beinn Dearg and the peaks of Freevater, upper Strath Vaich, Diebidale, Glencalvie and Amat. The SLA also includes the Corrieshalloch Gorge and most of the low-lying Strath More which runs between the gorge and the head of Loch Broom.

Area 519.81km² (51981.98ha)

Overview This area represents a complex sequence of hill ranges where the combination of rugged terrain, high tops, lonely glens and upland lochans, coupled with difficult access and lack of habitation over an extensive area, produces a powerful sense of remoteness and solitude. A sharp transition from rugged uplands to more fertile, inhabited lowlands is also present here in the Braemore area.

The peaks and ridges in the southwest of the area tend to be better defined and tightly grouped. Those in the north and east feature more extensive areas of gentle slopes and high plateau summits

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- An extensive, complex, mountainous interior of predominantly rounded summits encircling rocky corries, penetrated by long glens, and peppered with small lochans, possesses a strong sense of massive scale and unity of character derived from its similarity of landforms and consistency of rugged ground cover.
- The wide extent of the mountain ranges, limited access routes, rough ground and uninhabited character combine to create a great sense of wildness within an expansive, mountain fastness.
- Although the surrounding foothills are less imposing, they are still exposed, forming simple, gently curving ridgelines blanketed with sweeps of heather which seamlessly join the upper slopes to the lower straths and glens.
- There are forest plantations and native woodlands in the lower sections of the glens and straths around the edge of the area. However, the dominant characteristic over most of the area is open, heather and grassland slopes interspersed with areas of scree, boulders and rocky outcrops.
- The fertile, settled landscape of Strath More, contrasts vividly with the surrounding upland mountain landscape. The more level ground on this valley floor, its meandering river, rich colourful pastures and small woods creates a strongly defined character significantly different from the overriding landscape character of the area.
- Hydro electric infrastructure is present on the south western boundary of this area where the draw-down shorelines of Loch Glascarnoch reduce the sense of wildness perceived elsewhere. Further reservoirs and hydro-electric infrastructure situated outwith this area are visible from elevated locations in the central southern section.
- Small areas of clear human habitation, vast areas where there is none.
- The majority of human interaction within the landscape is centred around the River Broom in

Strath More. Regular improved fields occupy almost every available part of the narrow floodplain with head dykes stretching up the slopes of the hills to the west.

Special Qualities

Rugged Mountains and Lonely Glens and Spectacular Panoramic Views

- A complex pattern of interconnected and remote groups of mountains, penetrated by long glens and strongly enhanced by a virtual absence of habitation, offers a powerful sense of isolation and wildness amidst physically challenging terrain. From many of the glens, it is difficult to see the mountain tops and, from the tops, it is difficult to see the glen floors.
- In the southwest of this area, the Fannichs are a cluster of high, well-defined peaks within a relatively small area. Most of the main summits are connected by a continuous, high ridgeline which makes them popular for high-level walks.
- Most people experience this landscape when travelling along the A835, viewing a spectacular mountain panorama. However the more remote interior is also visited by estate workers and those taking part in recreation and sport, eg hill walkers, cyclists, anglers.
- From the glens, it is very difficult to see the mountain tops and, from the tops, it is difficult to see the glen floors.
- North of the Ullapool road, an intimate group of four Munros lie at the watershed between the Glascarnoch system, Gleann Sguaib, and Gleann Beag. Beinn Dearg is the highest and most prominent of these and it is a key landmark on the Garve-Ullapool road.
- Further north, the broad peaks in the Freevater area – Seana Bhraigh, Carn Bàn and An Socach – give the experience of a remote high plateau which drops off dramatically on its northern side.
- The view northwest through the Dirrie More across the waters of Loch Droma to the distant peak of An Teallach often captures the attention of travellers en route to the west coast. This channelled view is particularly striking on a clear winter's day when Loch Droma is frozen over and the strata of the cliffs of An Teallach are clearly etched by snow.
- The view down Strath More from the elevated position of the A832 near its head, is a striking one and the viewpoint here is a popular stop for tourists. The lush pastoral quality of the valley floor and its attendant diverse woodland contrasts with, and is tightly framed by the steep rugged hillsides above.
- The remains of a number of cleared townships survive in Glen Calvie.
- A series of quiet, uninhabited glens, punctuated only by a few lonely bothies, and remote coires extend towards the core of the mountain heartland, contributing to a landscape where solitude and isolation are key characteristics.

Impressive Natural Features

- The easily accessible Corrieshalloch Gorge, one of Britain's most impressive examples of a deep box canyon through which drop the spectacular Falls of Measach, offers an intimate and exciting landscape experience of striking geology, natural processes and exclusive ravine habitats.
- Alladale Pinewood and Amat Forest, the largest expanse of ancient Caledonian Pinewood in Scotland, provide a substantial, visible link to the native forest landscape which once extended over much of the Highlands.

- Sensitivity to change**
- Additional access tracks and fences in exposed mountain and moorland landscape could reduce the existing sense of remoteness and wildness experienced in the interior.
 - Introduction of large-scale man-made objects, even in areas just outside the SLA boundary could detract from the expansive panoramas obtained from the mountain summits.
 - Commercial forest is a feature of the Braemore area but further planting for timber production in the higher, more open glens could dilute the experience of a wild landscape. In the wide straths, further expansion of the existing forest area could impinge on views along the valley floor and also obstruct views to the mountainous interior. However, there are significant opportunities for native woodland restoration in this SLA, which would be compatible with its landscape character. Forest restructuring also offers the opportunity to improve the appearance of existing plantation areas.
 - Introduction of large-scale engineering structures would add to the cumulative impact of hydro schemes in the Dirrie More/ Glascarnoch/ Loch Fannich areas. It could change the pattern of these being isolated and relatively minor features to one where they are more prevalent, impingeing on the sense of wildness and distracting the eye from the characteristic prominence of the mountain tops and lochs.

Potential for landscape enhancement

- Expand native woodland in peripheral glens as transitional character between straths and open mountain landscape.
- Restructuring of coniferous plantation forest where necessary, particularly along Strath More and restocking with native broadleaved trees where growing conditions would allow it. This could eliminate rectilinear plantations and create a more logical and natural pattern of land cover.
- Mitigate/restore impacts of existing hydro-electric structures and associated infrastructure.
- Restoration of eroded tracks and repair of footpaths.
- Low-key visitor facilities in discreet locations close to the strategic route of the A835 (Garve-Ullapool) road.

Other designations/interests

- The wild qualities of this area are recognised in part by the two 'search areas for wild land' which are identified in SNH's Policy Statement on Wldness in Scotland's Countryside.
- Corrieshalloch Gorge is a National Nature Reserve.
- Amat Forest, at the north-eastern edge of the SLA, is the largest extant expanse of ancient Caledonian Pinewood in Scotland.
- Alladale Wilderness Reserve.
- Of architectural and historical note are a trio of "very handsome light bridges" built by Sir John Fowler (c.1870), engineer in chief and joint designer of the Forth (railway) Bridge; Fowler bought Inverbroom estate in 1867. One of the bridges crosses the Measach Falls in the Corrieshalloch Gorge.
- The Falls of Measach were the subject of a short but richly metaphorical poem by Norman MacCaig.

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in: Ferguson McIlveen. 1999. Ross and Cromarty landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 119

Stanton, C. 1998. Caithness and Sutherland landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 103.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

19. Cromarty Sutors, Rosemarkie and Fort George



Insert Map 19

SLA Ref. number/Name	19. Cromarty Sutors, Rosemarkie and Fort George
Location and Extent	<p>REFER TO MAP FIGURE 19.</p> <p>This area of intersecting firths and pointed headlands stretches from Port An Righ (just south of Shandwick) across the Sutors at the mouth of the Cromarty Firth, along the northeastern edge of the Black Isle to take in Chanonry Point, then across the inner Moray Firth to take in Fort George, and Whiteness Head.</p>
Area	96.398 km ² (9639.8 hectares)
Overview	<p>This SLA encompasses some of the key landscape features of the Inner Moray Firth. It is an area of contrasts which forms the gateway between the open coast and expansive waters of the Moray Firth and the intimate landscapes of the Cromarty and Inverness Firths. The twin headlands at North and South Sutor which stand guard over the entrance to the Cromarty Firth are another key feature, visible from a considerable distance. Another important juxtaposition is formed by the opposing low lying promontories at Chanonry and Fort George which reach out to each other and mark the entrance to the Inner Moray Firth. Both promontories have landmark buildings at their seaward extremities and are vantage points in their own right. However as landforms and as examples of human geography they are perhaps best appreciated from the higher ground adjacent and to the north. This elevated perspective also reveals the extensive sandbanks between Fort George and Whiteness Head.</p> <p>The steep coast between the South Sutor and Rosemarkie provides further contrasts and represents a resource of semi-wild land in an area which is otherwise man-modified or inhabited to some degree.</p>

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- The diverse coastal edge includes straight and indented geometry, soft shingle bars and hard cliffs, developed and undeveloped land uses and distinctive coastal landforms (including the spits at Chanonry Point, Fort George, and Whiteness, and the headlands of the Cromarty Sutors).
- Contrasting and distinctive visual experiences are provided by the juxtaposition of elevated and sea level viewpoints and views across enclosed and open firths. Contrasting perceptions of exposure and shelter are associated with the open coast and enclosed firth.
- The dominant undeveloped coastal edge is punctuated by the occurrence of settlements, and isolated dwellings and farmsteads dot the higher ground above the cliff tops. Huddled close to the shoreline, and densely packed, settlements retain core historical and cultural integrity and strongly and distinctively reflect their exposed coastal position.
- Most of the coastline in this SLA – the stretch between Rosemarkie and Port an Righ - is however steep and undeveloped, punctuated only by the occurrence of isolated dwellings and farmsteads dotting the higher ground above the cliff top
- The distant mountain backdrop in many views gives distinctive Highland context to the interplay of views back and forth across the firth.
- The regular pattern of farmland on inland slopes provides an attractive contrast to the more natural shorelines of cliffs, shingle banks and mudflats.

- Unusual contrasts in scale are experienced where huge oil-rigs or large ships are viewed within the enclosed firths in the context of small scale settlement and in contrast to the horizontal arrangement of sea, land and sky.
- The citadel of Fort George is a substantial and distinctive man-made feature in the landscape, which itself offers views of the SLA from a historical 'defended' position. The fort is linked to Ardersier by the B9006, a road that follows the line of the original military road.
- The remains at the South Sutor form part of what is probably one of the most complete coastal batteries surviving in Scotland.
- Some sense of remoteness and tranquillity is obtained in the less accessible areas and the cliffs and thickly wooded gullies on the steep outer edge of the Black Isle are local havens for wildlife. However, with the presence nearby of coastal settlements, ports and an airport, human activity is usually noticeable in this area – on the land, in the sea, or overhead.

Special Qualities

Distinctive Variety of Coastal Scenery

- The main scenic interest of the area is the visual interplay of land and sea at these two distinctive gateways to the Inverness and Cromarty Firths. The opposing spits of Chanonry and Fort George together represent a feature which is uncommon and this juxtaposition can be enjoyed from a variety of perspectives (eg from Chanonry Point itself, which is also notable for dolphin sightings, or more majestically from the high points of the road between Janefield and Eathie). The high viewpoints also reveal the full extent of the sandbanks off Fort George and Whiteness Head. The Sutors also provide high vantage points, with contrasting views of the narrow mouth of the deep Cromarty Firth and the wide expanse of the Outer Moray Firth.
- The diversity of coastal landscape here includes the dramatic contrasts between steep cliffs and low sand and shingle bars.
- Long sections of undeveloped natural or farmed and forested coast are punctuated by occasional settlements or other developed land uses.
- The area is experienced in a number of ways including birds' eye views from aircraft, elevated views from areas of high ground and low level views from boats, ferries and the shoreline,

Expanse and Containment

- The area offers a wide range of visual and perceptual experiences within a restricted area. In large part this stems from strong contrasts associated with the proximity of exposed and sheltered situations, developed and undeveloped coastline, and the availability of different perspectives from varying elevations and viewpoints.
- Unusual visual and perceptual contrasts are provided by oil-rigs and large ships viewed within enclosed firths against settled landscape backdrops.

Strong Cultural and Military Landscape Links

- The location and form of settlement typically shows a very strong response to the landscape, including the impressive Hanoverian fortress of Fort George, which has a very dramatic and direct strategic relationship with the coastline of the firth.
- Cromarty is known as “the jewel in the crown of Scotland’s vernacular architecture” and it is a truly outstanding collection of 18th and early 19th century dwelling houses and public buildings.
- Located at the North Sutor, and highlighting the strategic importance of this area throughout history, are the Scheduled remains of Dunskeath Castle, a 12th century defensive motte and bailey, flanked on either side by 20th century coastal batteries.
- In the most northern area of this SLA stand the remains of the oldest defensive structures; an Iron Age fort, consisting of three ruinous walls and two outer ramparts, with a later circular structure crowning the top of summit (possibly a dun or a well-built hut circle) and, some 250m to the west, a structure that crowns the top of a prominent knoll which has been levelled to accommodate it.
- The Nigg Ferry follows the pilgrimage route taken by King James IV of Scotland and connects landscapes which would otherwise be very distant overland.

**Sensitivity
to change**

- Development which could compromise the physical integrity and views of key landforms, such as the Sutors of Cromarty, the Eathie cliffs and the Channonry and Fort George promontories, built features, such as Fort George and Chanonry Lighthouse, and stretches of natural shoreline by introducing man made elements of a scale or nature which would detract from the appreciation of these features.
- Prominent buildings or structures in the presently undeveloped locations on the northern shores.
- Infill development which would result in the coalescence of the distinct settlements of Fortrose and Rosemarkie.
- Offshore installations which could interrupt seaward views or detract from the clean lines of the coast here by adding new man-made structures which become visual foci..

Potential for landscape enhancement

- Removal or re-structuring of existing forest plantations around Eathie to improve landscape integration and reduce incongruity.
- Restrict vehicular access to Chanonry Point to reduce the visual impact of parked vehicles.

Other designations/interests

- Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Listed Buildings and Inventory site Gardens and Designed Landscapes (Cromarty House and The Fairy Glen) underpin the contribution of historic settlements to, and man's influence on, the landscape.
- Hugh Miller, geologist and palaeontologist was born in Cromarty in 1802 and the Hugh Miller trail at Eathie offers an intimate experience of that part of the shoreline.
- The current church at Rosemarkie stands on a site whose Christian history possibly dates back to a foundation by St Moluag, who died in AD 592. The first mention of a bishop of Rosemarkie is in 1126.
- Defending the naval anchorage in the sheltered waters of the Cromarty Firth during World War I, and to a lesser degree, World War 2, the North and South Sutors contain a wealth of incredibly well preserved military defences, primarily gun emplacements. Today, alongside the remains of the batteries stand the remains of military camps, ammunition stores, observation posts, generator buildings and numerous individual buildings scattered throughout the area.
- In 1917 US engineers dredged the Yankee Channel in the Inner Moray Firth for the safe passage of vessels to and from the Caledonian Canal, thereby avoiding the long and dangerous passage around the north of Scotland. As a consequence, sea traffic is a notable feature of this area.
- The Inner Moray Firth, particularly between the Sutors and Chanonry Point is one of the best places on the U.K. coast for observing dolphins and whales. This wildlife interest is recognised by the SAC, SPA, Ramsar (Inner Moray Firth) and SSSI (Cromarty Firth, Rosemarkie to Shandwick Coast, Whiteness Head) site designations.
- Brahan Seer, Coinneach Odhar, the Scottish 'Nostradamus' was burned alive in a barrel of tar at Chanonry Point. Access to this information evokes a strong sense of the cultural history/development of the landscape.

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in:

Fletcher, S. 1998. Inner Moray Firth Landscape Character Assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 90.

Richards, J. 1999 Inverness District landscape character Assessment Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 114

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

20. Loch Ness and Duntelchaig



Insert Map 20

SLA Ref. number/Name	20. Loch Ness and Duntelchaig
Location and Extent	<p>REFER TO MAP FIGURE 20</p> <p>This area surrounds and includes Loch Ness from Lochend in the north to Fort Augustus in the south. It includes the bounding hill slopes on the loch's western and eastern shores, the prominent hill Meall Fuar-mhonaidh, which lies between Drumnadrochit and Invermoriston, and the elevated moorland and agricultural interior plateau which contains Lochs Ashie, Duntelchaig, and Ruthven.</p>
Area	260.19km ² (26019.13ha)
Overview	<p>This area is dominated by the vast linear expanse of Loch Ness within its dramatic landform trench, flanked by steep, towering wooded slopes leading to undulating moorland ridges and a contrasting remote interior plateau of upland lochs, small woods and rocky knolls. Whilst it may not qualify as Scotland's most scenic loch, the sheer scale and striking linearity of Loch Ness make it special. That is before one even considers the popular mysteries of its depths. The loch and its environs also typify the Great Glen as a whole – one of Scotland's most important natural features and routeways.</p>

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- The striking, linear landform trench containing Loch Ness offers a dramatic sequence of landscape elements along its length. The horizontal water's surface combines with adjacent steep slopes to create a simple and distinctive profile of contrasting planes and edges. The skyline is generally horizontal although there are occasional features such as hill peaks, pylons, telecommunications mast and views of wind turbines.
- The steep sided glen is often deeply incised by burns, rivers and waterfalls which frequently coincide with sheer rocky cliffs.
- There are long vistas of grand proportions and the sheer scale of the loch dwarfs the numerous cabin cruisers, yachts and vessels which frequent its waters.
- At regular intervals along the loch there are small areas of low lying pasture with associated settlements, which nestle at the mouths of the rivers flowing into Loch Ness. These offer a human scale juxtaposed against the vast extent of open water and dramatic linear landform character. Public access to the loch's shore is typically limited to these areas of habitation.
- To the east of Loch Ness an undulating moorland plateau characterised by rocky knolls and small-scale woods and forests, and peppered with upland lochs, creates an intricate landscape mosaic which contrasts strongly with the adjacent simple drama of the Great Glen.
- The quiet bays give relief from the unrelenting linearity of Loch Ness and more opportunity to savour its tranquillity. However, the quieter and somewhat more accessible shore and the forest walks also provide opportunities to experience this.

Special Qualities

The Dramatic Great Glen

- The powerful, imposing steep-sided landform trench, formed by a large strike-slip fault which slices through the centre of the Highlands, creates a dramatic sequence of linear landscape compositions which are easily accessible and readily appreciated. The very striking profile of the glen is typically best appreciated from either end, or from the water, although good views are also obtained from elevated viewpoints on the loch-side hills.

- The steep sided glen is often deeply incised by watercourses, including the notable Falls of Foyers, and is flanked by rich diverse woodlands and forests and contained by open smooth moorland skyline ridges.
- Strong contrasts exist between the northern and southern slopes in terms of access, activity and settlement which are all considerably more limited on the south side of the loch.
- There are vivid scenes of grand proportions and long vistas along a vast expanse of water, with the detail of foreground features gradually diminishing to distant silhouettes.
- Atmospheric mists and banks of low cloud over Loch Ness enhance the dramatic character of the scene, and reinforce the myth of the monster which is responsible for the many visitor attractions and facilities in Drumnadrochit.
- Urquhart Castle is a prominent focus, occupying a magnificent situation on an irregular headland of rock and commanding splendid views up and down the Great Glen.
- The landscape is typically experienced from the B852, B851 and the A82. From these routes, however, the loch is viewed at an oblique angle. High numbers of walkers and cyclists also view the landscape from the Great Glen Way and the loch is also used by a high number of boats, some travelling the length of the Caledonian Canal. From elevated locations along the glen, it is easier to appreciate the simple line, large scale and great expanse of the loch although, even from these places, it is typically difficult to see all of the loch in one view due to its great length and to be able to scale the landscape due to a lack of size indicators. From these locations, the glen is typically seen within a surrounding landscape of elevated plateau and hills.
- Most of these are indistinct in character, however Meal Fuar-mhonaidh is one example of a distinct hill peak. West of the loch, the isolated peak of Meall Fuar-mhonaid, which is nearly 700m high, stands out as a landmark clearly visible from both ends of the loch,. It is even prominent in views southwest from the castle in Inverness. Meall Fuar-mhonaid is a good vantage point from which to appreciate the massive scale and alignment of the Great Glen fault, and the approach to the hill through the high pastures around Bunloit is attractive.

Contrasting Intimate Plateau

- An undulating moorland plateau of rocky knolls flanked by small-scale woods and forests, interspersed with a sequence of tranquil lochs, pastures and sporadic farmsteads, creates an intimate mix of diverse landscape elements of changing visual interest.

Cultural Heritage

- Achculin, accessed from Balchraggan by a small track, is a well preserved depopulated township that is now a scheduled monument.
- On the western shore some recent crofting townships and older irregular townships.
- The eastern shore of Loch Ness incorporating Loch Duntelchaig, Loch Ashie and Loch Ruthven were clear foci of intensive prehistoric activity. Numerous roundhouses and field systems, interspersed with ritual and burial monuments such as burial cairns, burnt mounds and standing stones proliferate in this area; 3 crannogs are located on Loch Ruthven. This was clearly a highly significant area in prehistory which supported a large population.
- Two features dominate Fort Augustus; the Caledonian Canal, with its flight of locks, which links Loch Ness to Loch Oich and bisects the town, and Fort Augustus Abbey. The latter was enlarged in 1876 using stone from the original fort.

- Sensitivity to change**
- Large scale buildings or structures or forest/woodland schemes which would interrupt the simple lines of the moorland skyline ridges and reduce their contribution to the definition of the glen.
 - Development which would intrude on views both up and down the loch and from shore to shore.
 - Additional or upgraded roads on steep side slopes which would require extensive cut and fill or structures encroaching on the shore.
 - Any development which would require significant modification to landform in the undulating moorland plateau and could affect the sense of openness and remoteness of this part of the SLA.
 - The introduction of tall man made structures on the hill sides which would compromise the sense of containment and erode the appreciation of the vast scale of the landscape.
 - Combinations of developments which would result in a series of linear or point features which would distract from the sequential experience when travelling along the loch.
 - Both sides of Loch Ness are sensitive to the introduction of built development which would intrude on views up and down the loch and also across the loch.
 - Contemporary developments could compromise landscape setting of historic features, for example as viewed from Fort Augustus and Urquhart Castle.
 - Developments which would introduce levels of activity and noise which would disturb the tranquillity experienced during still weather conditions.
 - Introduce low-key, sensitively designed visitor/recreation facilities such as rough camping grounds, cycle tracks, piers and jetties in areas which are not visually prominent.
- Potential for landscape enhancement**
- Enhance the appearance of lochside laybys and viewing areas and maintain/create views of Loch Ness through appropriate management of lochside vegetation.
 - Restructure existing forests as the opportunity arises to reduce the adverse impacts of some existing plantations and incorporate greater proportion of native woodlands using current best forest design practice. It will be particularly important to mitigate the incongruity of some forest edges which are clearly apparent when viewing between opposite sides of the glen.

Other designations/interests

- Aldourie Castle is an Inventory site Garden and Designed Landscape which comprises a significant picturesque composition with contrived landscape views.
- Loch Ness is the largest fresh water loch by volume in Scotland.
- Loch Ness is best known for its alleged sightings of the legendary 'Nessie' - the Loch Ness Monster - first sighted by St Columba in the 6th century.
- In 2002, the Great Glen Way opened, comprising 73 miles of long-distance footpath from Fort William to Inverness.
- Loch Ruthven Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) , Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Ramsar and RSPB Nature Reserve, valued for its plant, bird life and for otters.
- Loch Ashie SSSI and SPA.
- Ness Wood SAC on the south side of the loch is a composite site encompassing 3 SSSIs.
- Urquhart Bay Woods SSSI and SAC on the north side of the loch.
- One of General Wade's military roads (the B852) runs along the shore of Loch Ness with a second (B862) running roughly parallel but taking a more circuitous route from Fort Augustus over the hills, via Loch Ceo Glais and Loch Duntelchaig. They converge on Dores before heading north to Inverness.
- At Foyers, a couple of prominent features of interest; the power station to the north of Foyers was built in 1975 and is connected, by tunnel, to two dams on Loch Mhor. Within Foyers is the imposing former British Aluminium Factory, founded in 1896 and closed in 1965. It is Category B Listed.
- Bridge of Oich is worthy of note, partly because of its unusual structure. On the north bank is an early 18th century single span rubble arch – all that survives of the original bridge. The remainder of the bridge is a 19th century 4-span wooden trestle bridge.
- At Brachla, just to the south of the Clansman Hotel in a small layby on the Loch-side of the road is a black and yellow AA telephone box dating from 1956.
- The Falls of Foyers are celebrated in a famous poem by Robert Burns.

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in: Richards, J. 1999. Inverness District landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 114.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

21. Loch Lochy and Loch Oich



Insert Map 21

**SLA Ref.
number/Name****21. Loch Lochy and Loch Oich****Location and Extent**

REFER TO MAP FIGURE 21.

This area takes in the section of the Great Glen which includes Loch Oich, the mouth of the River Garry, Loch Lochy, the group of high hills on its west side, and the eastern end of Loch Arkaig.

The area extends from Aberchalder in the north to Gairlochy in the south., and from Achnasaul and Gleann Cia-aig in the west to the edge of Glen Gloy in the east

Area

136.96km² (13696.68ha).

Overview

This area is dominated by the strong linear form of the Great Glen fault line with Loch Oich and Loch Lochy occupying the deep, v shaped valley. The lochs are bounded by steep slopes which rise to prominent and striking combinations of peaks and north-east to south west trending ridges, which contain views within the narrow corridor of the Great Glen.

Both lochs, together with Loch Ness and the linking sections of the Caledonian Canal, form part of the "grand processional way" which is the Great Glen and which is perhaps best experienced travelling by boat.

Views over gentle pastures across clear, reflective water towards wooded banks and rolling hills are often enhanced by hovering banks of low cloud or diffused by mist.

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- The trench-like landform of the Great Glen is of such a scale and consistency of form along its length that it is a highly distinctive corridor which provides an over-riding coherence within which a diverse range of smaller scale features are accommodated at a local level. Views up and down the glen present a strong sense of perspective often heightened by weather conditions.
- The smooth moorland ridges which define much of the lochs' sides are clothed in mosaics of heather, and grass with woodland clothing some of the mid and lower reaches. These slopes are often deeply incised by watercourses where areas of exposed rocky outcrops and crags occur. Imposing mountains contain and form the visual back cloth to the settled glen.
- Many existing forest plantations contrast in scale, colour, texture and line with the glen slopes. Associated forest tracks are also often prominent, particularly where they cross the steep side slopes of the glen in cutting or on embankment.
- Settlement tends to occur within small areas of low lying farmland that occurs occasionally upon the lochs' shores, either clustered at the ends of the lochs or at intersections of side glens. The features within these settlements provide a human scale in contrast to the expanse of surrounding hills and lochs.
- Loch shorelines are intricate in places creating small bays, inlets and promontories which offer a more varied sequence of views for canal boat users than that available to road users. A clearer appreciation of the form of the glen is typically only appreciated from the central part of the glen floor/ loch.
- Canal traffic is ever present and is particularly noticeable at the locks and bridges where boat users moor or queue. Here, the distinctive black and white canal buildings and structures form characteristic features.

- Interlocking sweeping peaks reflect some of the best preserved features of late glacial landforms in Britain.
- Isolated and remote peaks and corries appear inaccessible and wild in character, conveying an inherent naturalness, heightened by the presence of human elements in the glen floor.

Special Qualities

The Great Glen– scale, striking linearity, long narrow lochs

- This area forms a link in the chain of lochs and stretches of canal which extend from Inverness to Fort William. They lie in a large powerful and imposing steep sided v shaped glen, formed by a large strike-slip fault which cleaves through the centre of the Highlands.
- The two main lochs in this SLA are bounded by consistently steep slopes which contain and channel the views. In Loch Lochy's case, these slopes rise to an eye-catching group of peaks over 900m high on its west side. On its east side, a somewhat lower hill ridge parallels the loch for most of its length. This, in turn, parallels similar ridges above the glens Gloy and Roy further to the east, giving the impression of a remarkably regular, corrugated landscape, particularly when seen from the higher Loch Lochy hills.
- The Great Glen Way is a maintained and promoted route which allows visitors the opportunity to experience the area at a leisurely pace, remote from vehicular traffic.
- This is a distinctly interior landscape, part way along the Great Glen with features including the old railway line, the Glengarry Castle Hotel and the Well of the Seven Heads.
- Most people experience this landscape from the A82 on which vehicles tend to travel fast along this demanding route. Drivers' attention is consequently focused on the road ahead rather than on the surroundings except at locations where traffic is slowed at bridging points, road junctions and stopping place.

Classic Highland Scenery, Distinctive Mountain-top Views

- Views from low lying locations over agricultural grazings and lochs to steep wooded slopes and rolling summits are made more atmospheric in some weathers when mists and trails of low cloud roll in from the south west.
- Exemplary linear views along the base of the v shaped valley with reflective loch surfaces often mirroring the wooded slopes and bare hill tops and blurring the boundaries between land and water.
- Outstanding views from higher elevations, most notably from Meall Dubh and Meall na Teanga. These views along and across the Great Glen include Loch Ness more than twelve miles to the north and Ben Nevis a similar distance to the south. The wider views also include to the sweep of mountains to the north and west, and in clear conditions extend as far southwest as Mull and Colonsay.

Intimate Drama

- Comfort and shelter gained from the intimate sense of scale and proximity to the lochs' shores, rolling pastures and human settlement contrasts with the sense of drama and grandeur of the glen.
- Detail is rich and diverse when viewed at close range, but it becomes indistinct with distance when the simple combination of the wooded slopes and hills on either side of the lochs become the dominant visual focus.
- The double waterfall at the mouth of Gleann Cia-aig comes crashing down from the hills north of Achnacarry into a deep pool called the "Witch's Cauldron" and adds dramatic movement and noise.
- Comfort and shelter gained from the intimate sense of scale and proximity to the lochs' shores, rolling pastures and human settlement contrasts with the sense of drama and grandeur of the glen.

Càrn Bhealach, on the west side of Loch Lochy, is a classic hanging valley and steep mountain pass which is angled in such a way that it is well seen in its entirety from the main A82 road on the main valley floor.

Sensitivity to change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development such as large focal features could disrupt the distinct linear composition of the area or diminish the sense of scale. ▪ Any development or significant land use change could be prominent on the steep side slopes of the glen. ▪ Buildings or structures could interrupt the distinctive panoramas obtained from exposed mountain ridges ▪ Additional or upgraded roads which would increase the visibility of traffic from opposite sides of the lochs or increase the levels of noise in tranquil parts of the glen. ▪ Significant changes in the balance of land cover types, eg an increase in improved pasture or coniferous forestry cover at the expense of natural/semi-natural vegetation cover.
Potential for landscape enhancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduce roadside clutter such as signage. ▪ Restore damaged areas alongside roads and parking areas. ▪ Replace and redesign structures which have adverse impacts, e.g. some road barriers. ▪ Regeneration of native broadleaf and coniferous woodland integrating areas of coniferous plantation. Restructuring including the removal or design mitigation of existing forest tracks which have adverse impacts, particularly those on upper slopes. ▪ Consider the potential for re-routing or under grounding power lines where these have adverse impacts on key views or impinge on the character of key routes.
Other designations/interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Views towards areas identified as 'Search Areas for Wild Land' in SNH's policy Statement on Wildness in Scotland's Countryside. ▪ Achnacarry is an Inventory Site Garden and Designed Landscapes. A long association with Clan Cameron, Achnacarry is a mid 19th century re design of an older 17th century landscape with remnants of Ancient Caledonian Pinewood and other notable trees. ▪ In Invergarry two crannogs are located within the loch close to the mouth of the River Garry and the ruinous late 16th, early 17th century Invergarry Castle stands on the shores of the loch at Castle Bay. ▪ Built in 1727, "the first Scottish ironworks of any historical importance was the blast-furnace at Invergarry. The furnace commenced work on 25th August, 1729, and closed down, for want of iron ore on 9th February, 1736." All traces of the furnace and buildings have been obliterated but considerable scatters of blast furnace slag can be found in the area. ▪ Located in the centre of the eastern end of Loch Arkaig is a small artificial island (Eilean Loch Aircaig). The island was originally constructed in prehistory as a crannog and has since been re-used for a medieval and post-medieval chapel and burial ground. ▪ General Wade's Military Road follows the eastern shore of Loch Oich from Aberchalder to North Laggan – the now dismantled railway traced the same route as General Wade. At North Laggan the A82, with a small number of detours and slight amendments to the route, follows the original line of General Wade's military road.

- At Gairloch is the notable three-arch Mucomir Bridge spanning the River Lochy built c.1815 by Thomas Telford.
- Bridge of Oich is a splendid suspension bridge designed by James Dredge in 1854 on one of the original road networks through the wilderness of northern and central Scotland.
- Lizzie, a three humped, plesiosaur-like creature akin to the Loch Ness monster is reputed to live in the waters of Loch Lochy.
- The Battle of Shirts between Clan MacDonald and Clan Fraser was fought at Laggan in 1544.
- The Caledonian Canal connecting Corpach near Fort William with Clachnaharry in Inverness was completed in 1822 with over two thirds of its length formed from three connected lochs – Loch Ness, Loch Oich and Loch Lochy. Built by Thomas Telford the canal complete with 29 locks is regarded as one of Scotland's greatest engineering feats and remains popular with all leisure crafts
- An annual Ben Tee hill race of 14.5km occurs through this remote landscape.

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in: Environmental Resources Management. 1998. Lochaber landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 97.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

22.Drynachen, Lochindorb and Dava Moors



Insert Map 22

**SLA Ref.
number/Name****22. Drynachen, Lochindorb and Dava Moors****Location and Extent**

REFER TO MAP FIGURE 22

This area covers most of the higher moorland which separates the Cawdor-Ferness-Beachans area of Nairn district from Strath Spey to the south and the route of the A9 to the west. It incorporates the continuous moors of Drynachen, Lochindorb and Dava and extends from Carn nan Tri-tighearnan in the west to Lang Hill and Carn Kitty in the east. The area is traversed by two high-level roads running north-south – the A939 from Ferness to Grantown-on-Spey and the B9007 from Ferness to Duthil. Therefore the landscape is commonly experienced from the inside out. The only major natural breach in this high moorland area is the incised valley of the River Findhorn where it runs between Ruthven and Drynachen.

Area in hectares245.44km² (24544.57ha)**Overview**

This landscape comprises high rolling moorland, which has a consistency of character derived from gentle gradients, limited relief, and management of much of the area as grouse moor. Although this moorland is not as extensive as other moorlands further north, it is valuable for being located mid-way between a number of settlements and for being easily accessible via several roads which pass through the area. High tableland of this extent, which can be traversed by and appreciated from public roads, is relatively rare in Highland region. Key characteristics are the homogeneity of this area, its sense of spaciousness, wide views, and sparse human presence.

Elements of human intervention are evident within this landscape, most obviously in the form of tracks, fences, muirburn patterns and fencing. However, it retains a strong sense of tranquillity as well as some wildness qualities, which are emphasised by an almost complete absence of built structures.

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- Rounded slopes leading to summits of relatively uniform height with a large expanse of elevated, undulating blanket bog, and moorland smooth and heather clad. Woodland cover is limited in extent and there are few buildings or structures.
- Where buildings do exist, they are of a distinct estate architectural character
- The strongly horizontal composition of elements is dominated by the sky and moorland, and a simple and prominent skyline in between. Occasional foci do exist, however, such as small craggy hills, lochans and lodges.
- Views across the undulating moorland offer wide, open horizons and broad panoramas in all directions, providing visual connectivity with the higher mountain ranges to the north, west and south
- The heather moors are defined by distinctive, geometric muirburn patterns which create an abstract mosaic of colour and texture across the slopes, and identify this as partly a man-made landscape where land management for grouse shooting is the primary activity.
- There are isolated fragments of native pine-birch woodland scattered across the area. This is an attractive feature which serves (by contrast) to emphasise the dominance of the horizontal dimension and unbroken skylines that predominate across the open landscape.

- The moorland plateau is dissected by a series of incised river valleys, many of which are flanked by estate access tracks leading into the moorland core. Distinctive rocky outcrops occur and the more steep-sided valleys, such as that of the River Findhorn at Drynachen, offer enclosed and intimate relief from the surrounding expansive moorland.
- The limited network of public roads through the area, lack of habitation and other built features and open character convey a sense of remoteness and isolation. This is reinforced by the notable consistency this character throughout its extent. There is a strong sense of tranquillity in many parts of this landscape.
- Some access tracks are cut into the slope, resulting in visible excavation and consequent erosion
- Lochindorb stands out as the only major tract of open water in the area and has the added interest of ruined castle on an island in the middle. The loch has low-lying shores and is fringed with pockets of sheltered pastoral farmland, offering a pleasant contrast to the dominant surrounding moorland.

Special Qualities

A Sense of Solitude, Views over Heather Moorland, and Big Skies

- Expansive views and broad panoramas across open, rolling moorland and vast skies instil a boundless sense of scale and space, enhanced by the consistency of moorland cover and landform character.
- A narrow, deep section of the Findhorn river valley at Streens offers enclosed and intimate relief in contrast to the elevated and exposed moorland. Elsewhere, valleys frame views to Lochindorb.
- Land management practices create distinctive abstract muirburn patterns, accentuated by ever-changing weather and light patterns.
- The limited extent of tree cover and human habitation creates a simple yet powerful moorland image of tranquillity, simplicity and isolation which is emphasized by Lochindorb and its ruined castle.
- Where buildings exist, these are of a distinctive estate character. Also building remains from pre clearance farmsteads, with enclosures, head dykes and associated field systems and improved land form one of the few built and 'managed' elements within the landscape.
- The long, fairly straight routes through this landscape allow an easy appreciation of the openness and simplicity of the landscape. These are typically lined with permanent snow poles which serve to reinforce the impression that this is a landscape exposed to adverse weather.

Sensitivity to change

- The undifferentiated moorland landscape, characterised by expansive horizons and broad panoramas may be diminished by further features which break up the composition.
- The sense of isolation, extensive panoramas and impression of wildness could be compromised by the introduction of further buildings or other structures.
- The consistency of appearance of the moorland character could be damaged by variation in land management practices that led to significant changes in the balance of ground cover types.
- The introduction of further woodland or forest development in areas of open moorland, remote from watercourses, which would break up the continuity of land cover and interrupt or obstruct views.
- Key landscape management priorities should be to protect it from fragmentation and encroachment by unsympathetic forms of development which could disrupt the wide and uncluttered horizontal views

Potential for landscape enhancement

- Remove redundant fences.
- Rationalise or restore access tracks.

Other designations**/interests**

- Carn nan Tri-tighearnan SAC/SSSI.
- This area is identified as a Key Area of Open Landscape and Habitat in the Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy (2006).
- Scheduled Monument Lochindorb Castle, a former stronghold to the Clan of Cumming, sits on a partly man-made island in the loch. It is only accessible by boat, although landing is currently discouraged to protect birds from disturbance.
- Scheduled Monument, Alltlaigh, farmstead 1990m NE of Cnapan a'Choire Odhair Bhig
- Scheduled Monument, Aitnoch, cairn, hut circle + field system
- The route of the B9007 and A940 are both largely faithful to the line of original military roads that crossed this area.
- Paul's Hill wind farm lies adjacent to the eastern boundary of the SLA.
- Robert Louis Stevenson described the bleak moorland in 'Kidnapped' as '...it was virtually trackless, and a wearier looking desert man never saw.'
- In 1880, a train became snowbound south of Dava Station in drifts which lay up to 60 feet (18 metres) above the coaches.
- The foot section of the Nairnshire Challenge, a 31-mile duathlon on foot and bike, takes place within this SLA.

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in:

Richards, J. 1999. Inverness District landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 114.

Turnbull Jeffrey Partnership. 1998. Moray and Nairn Landscape Character Assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 101.

Turnbull Jeffrey Partnership. 1996. Cairngorms Landscape Character Assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 75.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

23. Glen Banchor, Laggan, Ben Alder



Insert Map 23

SLA Ref. number/Name **23. Glen Banchor, Laggan, Ben Alder**

Location and Extent REFER TO MAP FIGURE 23

At its northernmost boundary this area takes in the hills around Glen Banchor. It then extends southwest from the outskirts of Newtonmore through Strath Mashie to take in Loch Laggan and Creag Meagaidh. South of here, it includes the peaks of the Ardverikie area, Ben Alder and Beinn Bhèoil. Its southern extremity incorporates the section of Loch Ericht which lies between Coire Bhachdaidh Lodge and Alder Bay.

Area 401.93km² (40193.12ha)

Overview This SLA, located at the heart of the Central Highlands, combines a series of attractive, predominantly wooded glens interspersed with small-scale farmlands, with rising moorland leading to distinctive craggy summits and mountain plateaux which is of picturesque quality. Traditional estate farmsteads, cottages, castles and gatehouses throughout the glens enrich the sense of history within the area.

Within this area are two of Scotland's biggest and best-known Munros and the varied constellation of peaks which lie between them. The area includes Loch Laggan, with its unusual sandy beach, extensive areas of forest and fairy-tale castle at Adverikie. It also includes the more rugged, southern part of Loch Ericht, Loch Pattack, and a number of high corrie lochans

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- This complex and diverse area combines an intimate sequence of wooded glens estate policies and lochs surrounded by rolling moorlands leading to knolly mountains, craggy ridges and coires and mountain plateaux.
- There is a strong contrast between the glens and the smooth rising heather moorland which leads to a series of prominent knolly ridges, rugged coires, striking isolated mountain peaks and mountain plateau. In the glens, human influence is apparent in the distinct pattern of fields, enclosed by policy woodlands and forest plantations, and punctuated by buildings.
- There is a diverse landscape character within the glens. This is derived from the variety of native woodland, the flat, rich agricultural flood plain, and the frequent lochs, and enriched by estate cottages, castles and gatehouses, backed by the rising moorlands and mountains.
- Variable landform means that coniferous plantations generally merge well with the open hillsides above, and there is an almost seamless transition between woodland, forest, grassland and heath. Cascading waterfalls, small gorges, rocky outcrops and a scattering of birch trees further unites the moorland with valley floor and strath into a series of picturesque compositions.
- A series of mountain ranges orientated to a south-west – north-east 'grain', and comprising of rocky summits and ridges and crossed by remote high bealachs, lead to the high plateau in the south. Throughout this area, an extensive network of hill tracks and paths, primarily for estate management, penetrate through the mountainous heart, linking remote glens over long high mountain passes with a strong sense of remoteness.

Special Qualities

Ever Changing Compositions

- A contrasting combination of glens, mountains with small scale rocky landforms in between form a fairly chaotic composition with roads and reservoirs forming the main ordering elements.
- A dynamic sense of place is experienced through ever changing combinations of high mountain, craggy knolls and ridges, smooth moorland, dark coniferous forest and native broadleaf woodland, flat farmed strath and open loch.
- There are some striking features. Coire Ardair, on Creag Meagaidh is one of Scotland's most dramatic mountain corries. Creag Dhubh, near Newtonmore is one of Scotland's most impressive roadside crags. The Dirc Mhór, off the beaten track in the hills west of Dalwhinnie, is one the country's best examples of a glacial meltwater channel.
- Loch Laggan, an extensive body of open water flanked by wooded shores and slopes, separates the Aberarder and Ardverikie Forests, and provides the focus for long ranging panoramas and intimate vistas, particularly for users of the A86.
- Glen Banchor in the north is enclosed by a complex pattern of craggy hills and deep glens and displays a lonely character despite its relative proximity to Newtonmore and the busy A9 corridor.
- There is a picturesque sequence of contrasts between upland mountains and settled straths which are enhanced by castles and lodges.
- Cluny Castle and Glen Trium House, with their small-scale policy landscapes, give the area an added visual richness.
- The Monadhliath mountains form a simple landform horizon to the north in contrast to Ben Alder and Creag Meagaidh which have a more variable form.
- Creag Meagaidh is popular with visitors due the National Nature Reserve facilities while some people undertake the long walk to Ben Alder.

Cultural Heritage

- Medieval castles such as the ruinous castle on Eilean an Rìgh in Loch Laggan, depopulated medieval townships with many associated shielings in the hills, and post-medieval crofting townships and farmsteads.
- Settlement is heavily concentrated around the banks of the River Spey and, to a lesser extent, the River Truim. Prehistoric settlement is especially pronounced and present in significant concentrations along the River Spey to the south-west of Newtonmore. This area was clearly of importance in the Bronze and Iron Ages. Also present are contemporary defensive structures, such as the Fort at Dun da Lamh (Black Craig).

Sensitivity to change

- Large scale buildings or structures in core mountain areas could detract from the sense of remoteness and wildness.
- Additional tracks or widened tracks in upland areas which would require significant cut and fill and would result in visible scarring of the hill sides.
- Further buildings or structures or other proposals within the straths which would result in the removal of deciduous tree cover could upset the existing balance of openness and enclosure
- Further woodland planting could screen views to local built heritage features or reduce the variety of views and the quality of the travel experience.

Potential for landscape enhancement

- Harvesting of existing coniferous forests, particularly along Strath More, restocking with native broadleaf woodlands and using current best forest design practice could improve the relationship of the woodland to the underlying landscape characteristics.
- Promote natural regeneration of native broadleaf within the straths while ensuring that key views to historical buildings and features are retained or enhanced.
- Re-routing or undergrounding of overhead lines.
- Remove rhododendron ponticum to enhance the understorey diversity in woodland areas.

Other designations/interests

- Creag Meagaidh SPA, SAC, SSSI, Monadhliath SAC, Ben Alder and Aonach Bea SPA, SAC, SSSI, Creag Dhubh SSSI, River Spey SAC.
- Creag Meagaidh National Nature Reserve, noted for its exceptional range of plant habitats related to its altitudinal variation from loch shore to high mountain summit.
- The wild qualities of parts of this SLA are recognised by the two search areas for wild land identified in Scottish Natural Heritage's Policy Statement on Wildness in Scotland's Countryside.
- Ardverikie has been the setting for a number of TV/ film projects including 'Monach of the Glen' and 'Mrs Brown'.
- A listed Ardverikie House and associated buildings, and Ardverikie Gate Lodge and Bridge.
- The woodland to the south of the A86 contains the remains of some interesting features. During World War 2 the Newfoundland Overseas Forestry Unit was very active here and had a large presence. They used narrow gauge railways to transport the timber, the remains of which can be traced throughout the trees where, in places, the sleepers are still in situ. There are also the remains of a camp used to accommodate the Forestry Unit, and many building remains associated with the forestry operations.
- With only a few minor detours, many of the modern roads that cross the SLA follow the original military roads as laid out by General Wade, specifically the road from Dalwhinnie to Catlodge (A889) and on to Laggan from where it heads west past Loch Crunachdan to Garva Bridge, just outwith the SLA. A further military road follows the River Truim, on the opposite side of the river from the A9, before merging with the trunk road at Bridge of Etteridge.
- The northern portion of this SLA lies within Cairngorm National Park.

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in: Environmental Resources Management. 1998. Lochaber Landscape Character Assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 97.

Land Use Consultants. 1999. Tayside Landscape Character Assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 122.

Scottish Natural Heritage Landscape Group. 1999. Ben Alder, Ardverikie and Creag Meagaidh Landscape Character Assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 120.

Turnbull Jeffrey Partnership. 1996. Cairngorm Landscape Character Assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 75

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

Citation 24. Moidart, Arisaig, West Lochaber and Glen Shiel



Insert Map 24

SLA Ref. number/Name **24. Moidart, Arisaig, West Lochaber, Glenshiel**

Location and Extent REFER TO MAP FIGURE 24.

This SLA covers an extensive area of mountains, moorland and lochs which lies between Glen Shiel and Moidart. It also includes the coast of Arisaig from Mallaig to Loch nan Ceall, and the upper part of Loch Ailort. The area abuts against several National Scenic Areas – Glen Affric, Kintail, Knoydart, Morar/Moidart/Arndnamurchan, and Loch Shiel. The SLA designation indicates that the area it covers is at least of regional importance for its landscape.

The main areas covered are: upper Glen Shiel, Loch Quoich and upper Glen Kingie; Glen Dessary, Glen Pean and the upper end of Loch Arkaig; Arisaig and South Morar; the area around Glen Finnan and upper Gleann Fionnlighe; the lower end of Loch Shiel, and the hills between Loch Shiel, Loch Moidart, and Loch Ailort

Area 908.24km² (90824.87ha)

Overview This SLA covers a massive range from north to south, including a mountain interior of spectacular grandeur. The combination of high mountains, glens and lochs extending over a vast area, coupled with difficulty of access and sparse habitation, produces a strong sense of remoteness and solitude within the interior. A strikingly diverse and intricate coastal landscape provides an intimate contrast with the vastness of the mountainous surroundings.

The extent of this SLA is strongly influenced by its linkage of surrounding valued landscape designated as National Scenic Areas.

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- An extensive series of high mountain ranges, orientated predominantly east–west, creates a pattern of long glens containing natural and man-made lochs, and produces a distinctive ‘grain’ to the overall landscape pattern at the broad scale. It is difficult to scale elements of the landscape within the interior due to a lack of size references. This helps to convey a sense that the landscape is immense and imposing.
- The combination of high mountain, glen and loch on such an extensive scale produces a coherence, simplicity and unity to the core of this landscape which is accentuated by the similar vegetation across the slopes and ridges of the high mountains.
- The upland area contains many peaks over 900m, some of which stand proud and aloof on their own, while others form part of long, enticing, high ridges.
- Draw-down shorelines unfortunately detract somewhat from the visual appeal of Loch Cluanie and Loch Quoich, both of which are large hydro reservoirs. However, this is offset by the grandeur of their surroundings.
- Towards the Arisaig coast, the high mountains give way to a landscape of lower, rugged moorland and rocky hillocks, interspersed with pockets of native woodland. This forms a transition zone bordering the coastal landscape.
- The rocky coastland formed from low, rounded peninsulas marks a dramatic contrast in scale, texture and enclosure to the mountainous peaks. This intricate section of coastline, dotted with offshore skerries, fringed with white sandy beaches and dunes, bays and machair, is backed by dense patches of native broadleaf woodland. This provides an intimate and diverse landscape experience enhanced by a sequence of views towards the distinctive

profiles of offshore islands.

- Road access to Kinlochhourn and Strathan is through straths and winding glens on predominantly single track roads. Some recent improvements have included re-routing, widening and straightening and in some locations, the intimate relationship with the underlying topography has been reduced.
- Settlement within the area is sparse, and where it occurs, it mainly tends to follow the coastal fringe. There are, however, a number of estate lodges and inns in the hill areas which form prominent foci at a local level. Normally on the banks of, or on the lower slopes adjacent to rivers and streams are the remains of shielings, buildings, depopulated townships and enclosures. The lack of habitation and access routes within the core of the area significantly enhances its sense of remoteness, solitude and barren character.

Special Qualities

Distinctive West Highland Composition

- The pattern of east-west-aligned mountain ridges, deep glens and lochs typifies the West Highland landscape. The opportunities to reach many high peaks and to sustain height over long distances makes this a popular area hillwalking area.
- Much of the area represents the “back door” into Knoydart. At Kinlochhourn and the junction of Glen Dessary and Glen Pean at Strathan, long, rough walking routes proceed west. Apart from the sporting estates and a limited number of forestry and hydro workers, the main users of this area are hillwalkers and wilderness enthusiasts who are often engaged in multi-day treks
- Loch Morar is something of a hidden gem, a very large, deep freshwater loch, with attractive wooded islands at its eastern end, and a shoreline with many small bays and headlands which is almost completely undeveloped.
- The area is very sparsely populated, particularly in the central and northern areas, with most communities lying close to the A830 road from Glenfinnan to Mallaig and around the southern end of Loch Shiel.
- Quiet, uninhabited glens and lonely peaks create a landscape experience where solitude, isolation, silence and remoteness are key features. Appreciation of the landscape is strongly influenced by the weather systems which roll in from the Atlantic and can rapidly change conditions of visibility and light. Spectacular sunsets are often obtained from areas of high ground and coastal locations.
- A rich local heritage of battle sites, places of refuge, and historical associations with the Jacobite uprisings and their aftermath, creates a strong sense of connection between the present landscape and the past.
- The A830 (Fort William – Mallaig) ‘Road to the Isles’ follows a well-defined glen which forms a major dividing line through the West Highlands - between the higher mountains to the north and the lower, yet still rugged, peaks of Moidart to the south. Running approximately parallel is the West Highland Railway line which crosses Glen Finnan on an iconic viaduct. In the north, the A87 (Invergarry – Kyle of Lochalsh) road hugs the shore of Loch Cluanie before winding through the almost unspoiled Glen Shiel.
- There is an intricate coastline both diverse, and intimate with rocky promontories containing white sandy beaches, impressive dunes and machair habitats, interspersed with scattered crofting and fishing settlements and fringed by rich native woodlands. Popular for its sand beaches and superb vistas, an integral feature of these views is the foreground detail provided by large numbers of skerries just offshore. Loch nan Ceall is particularly notable in this regard. This provides a stimulating sense of place and strong contrast against the mountains. It offers expansive views to the sea and distinctive profiles of the mountainous islands to the west.

- | | |
|--|---|
| Sensitivity to change | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Buildings or structures in exposed mountainous landscapes which would create distracting foci or significantly reduce the prevailing strong sense of solitude and remoteness and create distracting foci. ▪ Land use change which would introduce incongruous edges and contrast of textures and colours. Such changes would especially be significant if they involved construction of fencing in core mountain areas characterised by open grassy slopes and in broad, bare glens. ▪ Additional residential and other development types in the coastal zone (onshore or offshore) which would alter the balance between built and natural features and have an adverse impact on the extent and character of views to nearby islands. |
| Potential for landscape enhancement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Removal of incongruous coniferous forest blocks in Glen Shiel. ▪ Restructuring of existing forest areas and restocking with native broadleaf and coniferous species to eliminate geometric plantations with inappropriate straight boundaries ▪ Removal of dilapidated and redundant fences and repair of roadside walls. ▪ Landscape mitigation measures associated with new or improved stretches of road. The effect of these measures should be monitored and they should be supplemented where necessary. ▪ Adjust management procedures to allow restoration of vegetation upon reservoir draw down scars. ▪ Further native woodland regeneration around the reservoir shores could help to soften the impact. |

Other designations/interests

- The SLA is all but surrounded on three sides by five National Scenic Areas (NSA) – Loch Shiel; Morar, Moidart and Ardnamurchan; Knoydart; Kintail; and Glen Affric. Collectively this SLA and the five NSAs cover an extensive area of coastal, deep freshwater and sea lochs and remote rugged mountain interiors.
- SACs, SPAs and SSSIs at Glen Beasdale, Loch Arkaig, West Inverness Shire Lochs and Claish Moss.
- The wild qualities of the interior of this area are recognised in part by the identification of three areas of search area for wild land identified in Scottish Natural Heritage's Policy Statement on Wildness in Scotland's Countryside.
- Three Inventory sites Gardens and Designed Landscapes exist at Larach Mor, Arisaig House and Kinlochmoidart.
- The Battle of Glenshiel between the Jacobites and Government forces took place in 1719 and prevented the projected Jacobite uprising.
- The A87 follows (loosely in places) the Fort Augustus to Benera military road – where the A87 diverges from the original route, the military road survives in remarkably good order (the eastern extent away from the A87 is scheduled)
- Glenfinnan Viaduct has been used as a location for several films and television series, including 'Charlotte Gray', 'Monarch of the Glen', and three Harry Potter films. Glenfinnan Viaduct, as well as being an iconic structure, is also of note because it is made almost entirely of concrete and was the first and longest mass concrete viaduct in Britain.
- Eilean Fhianain, Loch Shiel – St Finan founded a cell here in the 7th century, and it has been the resting place of the Clanranalds until the late 16th century. Also contains the remains of a chapel, built c.1500.
- The area has strong connections with Bonnie Prince Charlie, specifically the raising of his standard at Glenfinnan and his subsequent escape, and hiding within this area, after the Battle of Culloden. Glenfinnan Viaduct has been used as a location in several films and television series, including 'Charlotte Gray', 'Monarch of the Glen', and most famously 'Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets' and two subsequent Harry Potter films.
- In the summer the heritage Jacobite steam train operates along the West Highland Railway line.
- The Sands of Morar and their fine seaward views were used to good effect as one of the settings for the film "Local Hero".
- Operation of the Cluanie hydro dam has sometimes been used to manage and mitigate flood risks at the other end of the Ness catchment – Inverness.

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in: Environmental Resources Management. 1998. Lochaber landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 97.

Richards, J. 1999. Inverness District landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 114.

Stanton, C. 1996. Skye and Lochalsh landscape assessment.
Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 71.

*All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish
Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk*

25. Outer Loch Sunart and Islands



Insert Map 25

**SLA Ref.
number/Name****25. Outer Loch Sunart and Islands****Location and Extent**

REFER TO MAP FIGURE 25

This coastal area covers the lower reaches of Loch Sunart and Loch Teacuis. It takes in Ben Hiant and Ben Laga on its northern (Ardnamurchan) side and from Auliston Point to Camas Glas on its southern (Morvern) side. The area includes the group of islands at the junction between Loch Sunart and Loch Teacuis.

Area79.31km² (7931.16ha)**Overview**

This sheltered and intricate coastline is dominated by the complex interplay between land, shore and sea, where views are predominantly focused across the tranquil waters of Loch Sunart. The area has considerable diversity within a small compass. It is intimate and mellow for the most part, but it also has parts which are exposed and dramatic.

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- A sheltered, intricate sequence of coastline, with a dynamic mix of rocky cliffs and sheltered sandy bays, separated and defined by promontories, outcrops and skerries. The gentle interplay between land, shoreline, water and islands is the dominant characteristic. It is a landscape of varied textures which is lit in different ways by changes in the seasons, weather and lighting.
- A distinctive stepped landform profile derived from historic basalt lava flows, blanketed by a grassland and heather mosaic, creates a consistently craggy and rugged coastal moorland fringe to the intimacy of the coastline.
- To the north, pockets of native broadleaved woodland and Scots Pine nestle on the lower slopes and around sheltered bays, emphasising the contrast between the coast and the landward area. To the south, coniferous plantations are more extensive, especially around Loch Teacuis.
- A generally low lying area with only Ben Hiant and Ben Laga creating any notable relief.
- Road access is limited to the northern shore only, where an extensive dispersed pattern of houses and other buildings occupying the small scale flatter areas are readily absorbed into the intricate coastal pattern of bays, headlands and small woods. By contrast, although prominent in views from the opposite slopes, the southern shore is remote, inaccessible other than by boat and uninhabited
- The larger islands of Oronsay and Carna, together with a series of smaller isles, skerries and rocky outcrops, provide focus to the coastal views within the sea loch and contribute to the diverse seascape character of the area. The rectilinear fish farm cages at Camas Glas form man made visual foci visible from the jetty at Laga.

Special Qualities

Intricate Coastal Landscape

- A varied and intricate coastline, animated by a diverse mix of rocky promontories, skerries, shingle shores and sandy bays set within pockets of rich woodland. A dynamic sequence of seascape views which are heavily influenced by changing light and weather conditions.
- Rhythmic occurrence of settlements along the northern shore, typically situated at the heads of bays where the road bends inland to bridge rivers and burns.
- There is a changing relationship between the road and the coast where varied perspectives are obtained as the road curves back and forth along the coast, up and down gently undulating topography and in and out of small areas of woodland which screen and filter views. On emerging from wooded areas, new views are suddenly revealed making the journey one of repeated surprises.
- The intricate, often well-wooded shoreline, and the protection from wind and wave afforded by the islands, creates some very sheltered sea loch basins, channels and bays (eg Loch na Droma Buidhe and the outer basin of Loch Teacuis).
- Views over Loch Sunart are mainly from the northern shore both across the loch and along its great length with boat activity, including ferry traffic providing further interest and movement to the scene.
- The striking profile of the isolated peak, Ben Hiant, which stands like a sentinel at the mouth of Loch Sunart. The castle and policy woodlands at Glenborrodale, and the compact rocky peak of Ben Laga provide landscape interest and perspectives.
- Ben Hiant is a very distinctive, isolated coastal peak, which appears higher than its actual height of 528m would suggest. It has an unusual stepped (or cascading) profile which plunges steeply to the sea at the headland of Maclean's Nose. This profile and the texture of Ben Hiant's grassy slopes are particularly well seen from the fine coastal viewpoint above Camas nan Geall. Ben Hiant also has the remains of a ruined village high on its flank at Bourblaige.
- Ben Hiant and Ben Laga are both steep hills close to the coast which give impressive panoramic views from their summits over the surrounding area.

A Rich Archaeological Landscape

- This area contains a rich archaeological landscape that, due to the remoteness and difficulty in accessing many areas, is very well preserved. These features cover the entire area of the southern shore, including the islands. Of particular note for the excellent condition of survival are the scheduled remains of the townships of Auliston and Portabhata.
- On the northern shore at the mouth of Loch Sunart contains the remains of very well preserved depopulated townships. On the southern shore, the area was extensively settled with a sizable population in medieval and later medieval times with numerous depopulated townships and associated remains, including enclosures, fields, lazy beds, shielings, head dykes, fish traps, charcoal burning platforms, peat cuttings.

Sensitivity to change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Felling of existing woodland areas, which would affect the pattern of screening and revelation of coastal views along the length of the road. ▪ The addition of further marine installations (or enlargement of existing ones) could change the character of some sections of coastline or introduce noise and activity which would disrupt the tranquillity.
Potential for landscape enhancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve the appearance of shore based fish farm facilities and materials. ▪ Selective redesign or relocation of fish farms to reduce their visual impact ▪ Manage woodlands to maintain and enhance the sequence of concealed-then-revealed coastal views. ▪ Remove rhododendron ponticum where this obstructs coastal views and inhibits growth of native understorey species.
Other designations/interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Glenborrodale Castle's Inventory Site Garden and Designed Landscape forms a fine example of 20th century pleasure grounds. ▪ RSPB Nature Reserve near Glenborrodale confirms the rich natural history of the area. ▪ The landscape interest of Loch Sunart does not stop at sea level. This area is an attractive one for scuba diving because the lower reaches of Loch Sunart are rich in marine life, good sheltered dive sites can be found here in most weathers, and one of the West Coast's best wall dives lies just east of Auliston Point. The loch is designated as a marine Special Area of Conservation for its reefs. ▪ On the northern shore near the mouth of Loch Sunart are the remains of a Neolithic chambered cairn. There is also an 18th century burial ground which includes a standing stone, probably erected in the Bronze Age, with a carving of an early Christian cross on the face. At the eastern end of the SLA a dun stands in a prominent position overlooking the loch. ▪ Morar, Moidart and Ardnamurchan NSA lies to north, but not is not continuous with this SLA.
Landscape Character	<p>The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in: Environmental Resources Management. 1998. Lochaber landscape character assessment. <u>Scottish Natural Heritage Review</u> No 97.</p> <p><i>All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk</i></p>

26. Inninmore Bay and Garbh Shlios



Insert Map 26

SLA Ref. number/Name **26. Inninmore Bay and Garbh Shlios**

Location and Extent REFER TO MAP FIGURE 26

Located at the southernmost tip of the Highland region, this area forms the corner between Loch Linnhe and the Sound of Mull. It extends from Ardtornish Point on the Sound of Mull in the east to Camas Chrònnaig on Loch Linnhe in the west. This takes in Ardtornish Bay, Inninmore Bay, Rubha an Ridire and Garbh Shlios.

Area 47.53km² (4753.29ha)

Overview This is an isolated, and in its more western parts, a remote area of distinctive cliff features which are softened by a blanket of ancient broadleaved woodland. In terms of landscape it is also a dichotomy. The area has two quite different character tracts which reflect the differences in their geology and aspect. These meet abruptly at Rubha an Ridire and the west side of Inninmore Bay, where the striking geological contrast of basalt and granite landforms can readily be appreciated as part of the coastal backdrop. Behind the cliffs, rugged hillsides reach up to over 500m asl.

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- Striking sheer cliffs of dark basalt below a blanket of moorland with swathes of broadleaf woodland and scrub above sheltered horseshoe shaped bays. The bays form a marked distinction to the exposed mosaics of rugged rock and cliff face incised by watercourses, with outstanding mixed deciduous woodland and scrub.
- Contrasting with the coastal edge, open moorland scattered with granite boulders tumbles steeply down the ridges to the rocky shoreline with broadleaf woodland and scrub on the lower slopes and in the shelter of gullies.
- The rocky coastline is punctuated by sand and shingle bays, waterfalls. The coastline forms a largely consistent sweeping edge with only subtle promontories and indentations.
- Panoramic views from the cliff tops over the sea and to distant landscapes beyond.
- Settlement is very sparse limited to isolated dwellings and a number of ruins.
- Fine stands of native broadleaf woodland lie on inaccessible coastal slopes.
- Native broadleaved woodland, protected from grazing by its Cliffside location, is unparalleled in Lochaber. Base-rich substrate and a south-western orientation give rise to a rich and abundant flora and fauna.
- The remote and sparsely settled nature of the coastline and cliffs means that the area appears to be largely of a natural condition and with a strong sense of wild land, although views from the area to the adjacent sea and landscapes beyond include human elements.
- There are no public access roads into the area and visitors tend to arrive on foot or by boat. This contributes to the sense of remoteness and wild land. Most people experience this landscape from a distance and from the opposite shores.
- Looking into this area from across the Sound of Mull or across Loch Linnhe, it is often difficult to perceive the form of the topography. The cliff faces can appear almost two-dimensional unless highlighted by oblique/ low sun. It is also difficult to scale the landscape from a distance due to the lack of man-made features and reference points of a known size. In the views across to these cliffs and up Loch Linnhe unusual mirage effects can sometimes be

experienced in warm sunny weather.

- The steep cliff faces and slopes create an edge to the sea channel, creating a degree of enclosure within the seascape that otherwise tends to be exposed. From the sea below, the great height and vertical edge of the landscape appears imposing.

Special Qualities

Most people experience this landscape from a distance and from opposite shores. There is no public vehicular access to area, so tends to be experienced by foot or by boat.

Distinctive landscape features fashioned by geology

- Ardtornish Bay and Inninmore Bay display exposed mosaics of rugged rock and cliff face, fashioned from the underlying basalt, which have been incised by watercourses, along with fine mixed deciduous woodland and scrub.
- These striking black basalt cliffs loom high above sheltered bays, softened by a sweeping blanket of vegetation, and contrast with the nearby granite moorland mosaics, scattered with boulders, which descend to a remote, wooded shoreline.
- The sense of isolation and remoteness when viewed from Loch Linnhe is tempered by the adjacent Glensanda Quarry, where sandstone is extracted on a large, commercial scale and taken away by sea

Exceptional Woodland

- Noticeably different from other native broadleaved woodlands in the area, the ash and wych elm woods of Inninmore Bay contain a rich flora which is visibly distinctive. The shapes of the trees, their leaves, the time at which they grow and shed their leaves and the colours they adopt in autumn all set them apart from the oak and birch-dominated woods of other parts of Lochaber.
- The woodland above Inninmore Bay is dominated by Ash and Wych Elm, forming a dense blanket below the cliffs. The woodlands at Garbh Shlios, on the other hand, are dominated by fine stands of oak/birch woodland, with ash, hazel, wych elm and bird cherry lining the burn sides. The diversity of these woodlands is most readily appreciated at close range from boats in the Sound of Mull and on Loch Linnhe.

Panoramic Exposure and Seclusion

- Views out of the area from higher exposed elevations such as cliff tops at Aoineadh Beag or moorland ridge at Garbh Shlios reveal expansive seascape panoramas across sea loch, sound and islands.
- The Garbh Shlios coast facing southeast across Loch Linnhe is less steep, but is more consistently rugged and more exposed. It is trackless coastal wild land with extensive areas of native woodland. The views here are both wide and long – across to the long green island of Lismore and the hills of Appin and Benderloch, and all the way up the big, straight fjord of Loch Linnhe.
- The sense of isolation found in the secluded bays along this coast is heightened by the long walk in to Ardtornish Bay, the longer trek to Camas Eigneig, or the boat journey through the Sound of Mull.
- The section of coast facing southwest across the Sound of Mull is backed by steep cliffs. It is also semi-enclosed by Ardtornish Point and Rubha an Ridire. This together with the native woodland presence, gives it the feeling of a special enclave.

- Sensitivity to change**
- Development across the cliff faces or slopes could be highly visible from the sea and the opposite shore.
 - Increased activity or development within the area could compromise the sense of tranquillity and wildness, while the introduction of new man-made features, such as buildings, tracks, fences, or surface installations in the coastal waters adjacent, could seem incongruous to the openness of the landscape and compromise its unspoilt character
- Potential for landscape enhancement**
- Reinstate areas of post and wire fencing with traditional stone walls and repair walls where dilapidated.
 - Encourage continued regeneration and protection of native broadleaved and scrub woodland through grazing control.

Other designations/interests

- SSSIs cover Garbh Shlios and Inninmore Bay due to their outstanding examples of mixed deciduous woodland.
- Part of the Morvern Woods SAC.
- Once settled shores and bays were cleared for the creation of Ardtornish Deer Forest leaving the area desolate and heavily grazed.
- Ardtornish Castle was reputed to be the residence of the Lord of the Isles and formed a chain of eight castles on both sides of the Sound of Mull transferring beacon signals for over 30 miles. Attempts were made to restore the castle in the 19th century.
- A considerable number of ship wrecks are known from the area around Inninmore Bay and Ardtornish Bay, three of which are of particular note. The wreck the SS Buitenzorg, a steamship that was lost in 1941 on its way from Dundee to Calcutta, sits upright on the seabed, still largely intact. Just south of Ardtornish Point is the wreck of the “Evelyn Rose”, a trawler bound for the Faroes which sank in 1955 with the loss of 12 lives. A 19th century steamship, the Thesis, en route from Middlesbrough to Belfast, struck a reef and sank at Inninmore Point; the boiler is in place and ribs of the bow are exposed.
- Scuba divers are attracted to Inninmore Bay by the quality of diving at its eastern end. This includes two popular wreck dives - the “Thesis” and the “Ballista”
- Sandstone quarries dating to the 13th century yielded stone for local buildings until the 19th century.

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in: Environmental Resources Management. 1998. Lochaber landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 97.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

Citation 27. Ardgour



Insert Map 27

**SLA Ref.
number/Name****27. Ardgour****Location and Extent**

REFER TO MAP FIGURE 27.

This area is centred on the mountains of Ardgour in west Lochaber and extends from Cona Glen in the north to Camasnacroise in the south. The eastern boundary takes in the west coast of Loch Linnhe from just south of Inverscaddle Bay to Loch a' Choire. The western boundary broadly follows the watershed between Loch Linnhe and lochs Sunart and Shiel. The area therefore includes Glen Scaddle, Glen Gour, and most of Glen Tarbert.

Area237.64km² (23764.71ha).**Overview**

The Ardgour peninsula has a distinctive identity comprising rugged interior mountains contrasting with the wooded and sheltered shorelines of Loch Linnhe. Located on the quiet side of Loch Linnhe this area has an almost island sense of detachment even though it is part of the mainland. In the interior part of the SLA, are the parallel east-west trending glens notable for their open space and native woodlands forming natural routeways through the mountains to Loch Shiel and Strontian.

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- Distinct contrast of interior mountains, coast and glens with associated variation in scale, openness and enclosure.
- Complex, high relief landform.
- Rough mountainous interior with few roads and very sparse settlement.
- Deep west-east orientated glens occur at regular intervals and these linear spaces have a strong feeling of enclosure and perspective.
- Steep, interlocking peaks and ridges with a number of distinctive individual mountains.
- Gentle, low-lying shoreline of bays, promontories, river mouths and marshy platforms, with a narrow patchwork of crofting land in stark contrast to the muted colours of the mountains and moorland.
- Swathes of native broadleaf woodland and isolated areas of Scots Pine climb the lower slopes and burns rising from the lochside fringe softening the edge of the settlements here.
- Areas of rhododendron and other ornamental species, associated with wooded policies and parkland create areas of contrasting settled character.
- The complex and rugged landforms have a high proportion of exposed rock, seeming to pierce through a thin cover of grasses and heather.
- The peninsular character is reinforced by the sense of remoteness and typical arrival by either ferry or a long circuitous route. Roads tend to be single track, which means that the landscape tends to be experienced at a fairly slow speed when travelling through the area.
- The roads follow loch sides and glens unveiling striking vistas where a strong visual rhythm of alternating containment and exposure is experienced through successive undulating landforms, woodland cover and open space. Lush coastal pastures around wide sweeping bays are interspersed with rugged sections where the hills squeeze the road close to the sea.
- Throughout the area are scattered numerous shielings, abandoned buildings, farmsteads and the occasional township, and a number of prehistoric settlement remains.
- Views across the open waters of Loch Linnhe contrast with the looming presence of steep

hills and ridges. Near the coast these two components of views are of similar scale which creates a balanced composition.

- Views to peaks and ridges from the lower ground are complemented by extensive panoramas from higher elevations and summits. This results in a strong contrast of experience from the hill tops to the coast and glens.

Special Qualities

Prominent Interlocking Peaks and Glens

- Steep, interlocking peaks and ridges with a number of distinctive individual mountains: Garbh Bheinn is one of Scotland's finest peaks and is distinguished by bold, bare rocky ridges, buttresses and gullies; Sgurr Dhomhnuill is the highest mountain in the area and is prominent from many locations; Sgurr na h-Eachainne is a distinctive pointed hill above the Corran narrows and is prominent in many views along Loch Linnhe.
- The full grandeur of Garbh Bheinn is in fact best seen from a substantial distance away or from very close up. The mountain's impressive northeast face, nestling within an Alpine cirque, is invisible from the nearest roads and coast, those who patiently make the journey up the curving glen by foot are amply rewarded when the mountain face finally comes into view.
- Deep glens, including Glen Tarbert, Glen Gour, Glen Scaddle and Cona Glen, occur at regular intervals and with a similar orientation (east-west). They have a strong sense of enclosure with distant perspectives.
- The peninsular character is reinforced by the sense of remoteness and typical arrival by either ferry or a long circuitous, mainly single track, route which is the main through-route to Strontian and Ardnamurchan
- Prominent and distinctive peaks are visible from many locations, including from the A82 and A828 on the opposite side of Loch Linnhe. These peaks have well-defined summits, ridges and corries, and they are separated by deep, remote glens, of which only Glen Tarbert has a road. There is only sparse settlement at the seaward ends of these glens.

Semi-isolated, Peninsular Location

- The peninsular character of Ardgour is reinforced by the sense of remoteness and the typical mode of arrival in the area - by either the Corran ferry or via a long circuitous route. Roads tend to be single-track, which means that the landscape tends to be experienced at a fairly slow speed when travelling through the area.

Contrasts between Settled Shoreline and Imposing Hills

- Low-lying, open, and peaceful settled shorelines provide a marked contrast to the adjacent expanse of exposed and imposing mountains, moorland hills and water.
- Sheltered enclosure, and framed linear views provide a rich landscape experience when travelling through the area - either by road, track or footpath. On the coastal route particularly, the views both landward and seaward change significantly with progress northeast or southwestwards.
- Views to the skylines of peaks and ridges from the lower ground and lochside are complemented by extensive and inspiring panoramas from higher elevations and summits, with striking compositions of mountains and sea-lochs.
- There is a dramatic stretch of road between Kilmalieu and Loch a' Choire. Here the edge of the land is so steep and unforgiving that the narrow, single-track road clinging to it seems to be a temporary presence rather than a permanent one. There are few, if any, road routes quite like this one elsewhere in the Highland region.

- Sensitivity to change**
- The development of any structures, linear features, or significant new land use in the remote interior which would affect the sense of wildness, compromise the sense of open-ness or constitute distinct new features in themselves.
 - New structures or buildings on land or sea (or the enlargement of existing ones) which would obstruct or significantly detract from the quality of coastal vistas.
 - Structures which would visually connect the peninsula to the mainland and diminish the former's sense of detachment and remoteness.
 - Visitor interpretation and recreational facilities should be low-key.

Potential for landscape enhancement

- Regeneration of native broadleaved woodland and restructuring of coniferous forest to benefit both habitat value and landscape and visual amenity.
- Improve the appearance of existing roads and associated roadside furniture including signage.
- Rationalise/improve the siting and design of telecommunications infrastructure.

Other designations/interests

- This area has qualities of wild land which is recognised in part by the identification of a 'search area for wild land' identified in the SNH Policy Statement on Wildness in Scotland's Countryside.
- Cona Glen Pinewoods SSSI and SAC. The pines here are genetically distinct and suggest an origin in southern Ireland, a possible relict population from the last glaciation (Ice Age).
- Doire Donn woods, an area of native broadleaved woodland home to the rare chequered skipper butterfly and a nationally important assemblage of beetles.
- Ardgour House is an inventory site Garden and Designed Landscape and provides a fine example of 18th century parkland relating well with the dramatic setting.
- The Corran Ferry is one of the few remaining ferry crossings connecting sections of the Scottish mainland. Most elsewhere have now been replaced by a bridge. In 2001 the original Rosehaugh ferry was retired after 32 years service to be replaced by the larger Corran ferry. The route of the ferry lies on one of the ancient drove roads characteristic and integral to the cultural history of Highland Scotland.
- On the west facing slopes of Sgurr Dhomhnuill are the remains of Fee Donald Lead Mine, now abandoned. The underground workings consist of abandoned shafts and levels and open-cast grooves. The associated surface remains include masonry buildings, and a large processing area, including water-wheel pit, ore crushing and dressing floors, spoil-heaps and washing floors.
- Near the summit of Creach Bheinn in open rocky grassland are the remains of a campsite, constructed by soldiers of the Ordnance Survey early in the 19th century as part of the first triangulation of Scotland. Within the larger, northern part are a stone building, windbreak walls and three of the stone tent circles. Within the southern part of the area are the triangulation station and the fourth stone tent circle.
- Just over a kilometre to the east of the Ordnance Survey camp are the remains of a US Air Force F-101 Voodoo which exploded in mid-air and crashed in 1964, killing the pilot. The wreckage wasn't discovered for 10 days following the crash and there were rumours the plane was carrying nuclear weapons at the time. The wreckage is strewn over a wide area - See <http://edwardboyle.com/wreck35.html>.
- There is a small cruciform church in an attractive setting at Camas na Croise.

Landscape Character The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in:
Environmental Resources Management. 1998. Lochaber landscape
character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 97.
*All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish
Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk*